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WACE
His Literary Legacy

by

Marleen Hacquoil

A thesis presented to the University of Ottawa in partial
fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts in the Department
of English.



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Marleen Macquoil

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Preface

The last two hundred years have unravelled some of the enigma surrounding the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman poet, Wace. Although the evidence of his existence, his career and his craft is stated within the body of his work, literary scholars have been slow in coming to conclusions about his specific place in the tradition of medieval romance. The question still unresolved is whether he was simply a composer of duty poems (*serventois*) and a translator--albeit a gifted one--of Latin chronicles, or whether he was a significant contributor to literary developments in France and England. This thesis seeks to clarify the reasons for ranking him as an important literary figure in his own right, not only as the immediate precursor of Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France, but also as the author of two of the twelfth-century's outstanding historical poems in which the seeds of the romance genre are sown.

Although Wace has returned from critical obscurity to the point where he has become an object of some contemporary attention, his shadowy figure is still cloaked in mystery. Several scholars who have attempted to penetrate the penumbra¹ have failed to arrive at a consensus about his literary merits.

The 1800s saw a revival of interest in Wace after centu-

¹Notably Keller in a study of Wace's vocabulary, Houck in determining his sources, and Pelan in defining his influence.

ries of obscurity. Mancel and Trebutien (iii-vi) list only eleven references to Wace between the years 1610 and 1798. A dramatic rise in interest resulted in thirty more references for subsequent years up to 1841. This upsurge was caused in part by the arrival in England of two historians seeking refuge from the French Revolution: Abbé de la Rue and de Bréquigny, another antiquarian priest, discoverer of a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Rou*. On December 4, 1794, de la Rue presented his "Epistolary Dissertation on the Life and Writings of Robert Wace, an Anglo-Norman Poet of the 12th Century" to the Earl of Leicester, president of the Royal Society of Antiquaries. In his paper, he declares Wace to be "altogether unknown" to English biographers, and totally misunderstood by those who have studied him:

Besides, most of those learned men who have written upon his works have been entirely mistaken, either in the series of them which they have given, or in the opinions which they have adopted relating to them. It is my object, my Lord, to correct their errors. (50)

He credits Wace with ten "Romances," six of which are considered now to form the *Rou*, the four others being the *Brut*, *St. Nicholas*, the *Conception of the Feast of the Virgin*, and the *Chevalier au Lion*. His account was subsequently published in *Archaeologia*, alerting English

literary historians to the work being conducted on Wace in France.

England's reception of Wace's poetry was cool, to judge from one critic's opinion of Frédéric Pluquet's edition of the *Roman de Rou et des ducs de Normandie*, which appeared in 1827. Writing in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* of February, 1828, the reviewer saw "not one spark of the poetic fire" in Wace's poem, attributing the "lifeless tone" to the chilling apathy and sluggishness of feeling inspired by a cloistered life (82), although there is no evidence that Wace was ever a cloistered monk. The Pluquet edition may have been partly to blame for this negative response; Gaston Paris later called this edition of the *Rou* a deplorable literary falsification (592).

Despite the review in the *Foreign Quarterly*, not all English readers reacted unfavorably to Wace's poetry. Edgar Taylor undertook the first English prose translation--the Battle of Hastings section of the *Rou*, some six thousand lines complemented with illustrations from the Bayeux Tapestry--and published it in 1837 as an introduction to "this remarkable chronicle;-by far the most minute, graphic, and animated account of events preceding and attending the conquest of England by William, written by one who lived among the immediate children of the principal actors" (xv). Unfortunately no translation of the whole of either the *Brut*

or the *Rou* has yet appeared.

In 1836-38, at the time that Taylor's translation of the *Rou* appeared in England, Le Roux de Lincy in Paris brought out the edition of the *Brut* which was to serve scholars for one hundred years, until it was succeeded in 1938 by Ivor Arnold's definitive version, complete with a one-hundred-page introduction on the manuscripts, language, life, sources, style, and influence of Wace.

The *Rou*, like the *Brut*, benefitted from later and better critical editions. Hugo Andresen's edition (1877), though Gaston Paris labelled it "not definitive," served to reverse critical comment and earn praise for Wace's elegance and simplicity of expression. With the appearance of the most recent and best-received text, A.J. Holder's three-volume edition published in the early 1970s, those impressions have been largely confirmed.

Although Wace may be only a name to most English students, there are signs that as an historical figure he is moving from the academic to the public arena. Today his name is seen by a public which had never heard of him thirty years ago: the stream of visitors approaching the Centre Guillaume le Conquérant in Bayeux, France to view the Bayeux Tapestry passes through the Square Maistre Wace, where a plaque informs them that Wace was born in Jersey about 1110, died in 1174, and was "Poète et historien, chanoine de Bayeux." The

display surrounding the Tapestry makes several references to him and to his work, although Wace himself makes no mention of the Tapestry. And in St. Helier, Jersey, the States Building in the Royal Square bears a plaque to the island's native son.

Gaston Paris was the first major critic to have difficulty in deciding exactly where Wace's talent lies, and the extent of his literary influence on his contemporaries. Was he primarily a historian writing in verse or a poet chronicling history? Was he a stylistic model or merely a source of themes for his fellow writers? Paris' ambivalence over the literary indebtedness to Wace was never resolved. He regarded him on the one hand as a translator who adds only scanty adornments to Geoffrey's text, and on the other as the author of a work (the *Brut*) which has had great importance for literary history, influencing the most celebrated authors of the Middle Ages.

The *Brut*'s first modern editor credits Wace with having delivered more than a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*: Le Roux de Lincy calls the *Brut* an original and distinctive work of a type common to European nations at that period, a verse chronicle combining reality and pure fiction in a manner that marks the first step towards "the science of history" (Le Roux *Analyse* 50). Le Roux does not look for art in Wace's style: he finds no poetic genius, only ingenuity,

and a "poetic instinct" which gave movement and vivacity to his rhymes (55).

At the other end of the critical spectrum stands du Méril. He refuses to designate Wace as a historian, calling him simply a man of letters who put the past into verse. In the century and a half since Le Roux, critics have sided with du Méril, placing the poet's accomplishments firmly within the literary rather than the historical tradition: the manner in which Wace adds details to Geoffrey's Latin chronicle contributes largely to his "entire change of the literary form" (Fletcher 142); he is responsible for introducing something of the chivalric idea of Arthur and his knights, the conception of Merlin as a magician, additional touches about Gawain, the mention of Arthur's return and, for the first time in written literature, mention of the institution of the Round Table. Since these details lack a firm historical basis, it is Wace's approach in casting a twelfth-century mantle over quasi-historical events, and his fortuitous ability to incorporate oral legends into written form, that set him apart from other clerk-poets of his day. Arnold suggests that Wace "completes" Geoffrey's Latin text by adding vivid descriptive passages of everyday events, while avoiding the stereotypical descriptions of women which would become popular in later romances (*Brut* lxxxix).

Although many critics acknowledge Wace's professionalism

and mastery of his *métier*, their praise is sometimes diluted: Wace lacks the delicate touches that bring a personality to life (*Brut* lxxxvii); he is imaginative, but few of his phrases light up the page (Tatlock 466). Yet his influence on contemporary and later writers is no longer in dispute (Tatlock 476). Some critics point to his exploitation of romantic and descriptive motifs as an inspiration lasting into the thirteenth century, making him a model for Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, and Thomas of England among others (Frappier/Grimm 202, Pelan 166). Others claim that his influence as literary model and source was limited, and that his greatest contribution to other poets was the stimulus to create and invent, and to apply themes from other sources to the Arthurian background (Rickard 84).

Keller acknowledges Wace to have contributed in a distinctive way to the development of the literary language: Wace introduces many new words into the French vocabulary, and gives new meanings to other words. Keller's study suggests that Wace represents the transitional period between the old literary genres (*chansons de geste*) and new forms of expression (*littérature courtoise*). J.H. Philpot expresses the same conclusion:

He is one of the chief bridges over which post-classical poetry had to pass on its way from the memorized to the written word, from the diffuse

and careless prolixity of illiterate jongleurs, with their ignorant, uncritical and often scarcely sober audiences, to the well-knit conciseness and polished accomplishment demanded of verse that is made to be read in the ladies' bower and the courts of princes. (85)

This range of opinions confirms that scholars appreciate Wace's contribution for different reasons and in different degrees because our understanding of the artist and his times remains incomplete. Art in a period of transition is never easy to categorize. It was Wace's lot to stand at a moment in history when literature was moving from one long-standing tradition to another; he, of all the Anglo-Norman *clerics*, *trouvères* and poets writing and reciting at that time, had the good sense or the foresight to set down something of the popular tales then current, in a form--the octosyllabic couplet--that he helped to advance. Though he protested that he could not attest to the accuracy of the oral tales, he lent them sufficient distinction that younger writers did not shrink from their use and elaboration.

The scarcity of evidence in the form of original or complete manuscripts and the even greater scarcity of contemporary references to Wace and his work, help to explain some of the uncertainty surrounding his literary legacy. The fortunes of war, the whims of kings, and even storm and flood

have joined forces to erase his traces over the nine centuries since he scribbled beside his cold hearth, as Millais portrays him.¹ Late in the twelfth or early in the thirteenth century there is the evidence of Layamon's statement concerning the book "that a French clerk made, / who was named Wace / who well could write".² Layamon was referring to the *Brut*, the source of his own expanded version, also called *Brut* and written in alliterative lines. Abbé de la Rue claims that, aside from references by Layamon and Robert de Brunne,³ the King of Navarre is the only person among the medieval French writers to cite Wace's work, giving as a reason that Wace's poems were not esteemed at first, being generally unfavorable to the kings of France (62).

The absence of contemporary references to Wace may be disappointing for modern scholars, but is in no way unusual for the times. Wace never acknowledges Geoffrey as author of the book he freely paraphrases, nor does he mention Gaimar, who led the way in the matter of vernacular histories in rhyme, nor does he allude by name to Benoit de Sainte-Maure, who supplanted him in writing of the Norman dukes. For that matter, there are no historical records to verify Chrétien de

¹Illustration by Sir John Everett Millais in Wace, ses oeuvres, sa patrie, by John Sullivan of Jersey.

²Layamon's Brut. Ed. Sir Frederic Madden. London: Society of Antiquaries 1847. Vol. 1. 39-41.

³See The Chronicle of Robert Manning of Brunne: The Story of England. Ed. Frederick J. Furnival. London: Lords Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, 1887.

Troyes' claim that he wrote at the courts of Champagne and Flanders, and direct references to him are also rare. The evidence of Wace's many references to himself indicates that he was a self-conscious literary man, "deeply interested in himself and his own advancement" (Tatlock 464); moreover, Wace may have intended to encode his signature into the text of the *Rou* (II 345-46), in a *jeu de mots* unremarked until now: "la terre estoit en vasse, le païs estoit mol."¹

No coeval manuscript of any of Wace's poems exists, although there are twenty-two early manuscripts as well as two fragments of the *Brut* distributed among libraries in Paris, Montpellier, Vienna, London, Cheltenham, Cambridge, Oxford, and the United States. This "exceedingly striking" number of manuscripts still extant, as compared with, for example, the relative paucity of Chrétien's manuscripts, leads Tatlock to conclude that the *Brut* was popular and widely-read, "especially considering that the poem antedates the full blossoming of the romantic manner, with its love and all" (476). This premise is dubious, as Pelan points out (*Partie* 35), but Philpot accepts it, declaring on the basis of the eleven surviving copies known to him that Wace had been widely read and appreciated "so long as people could understand him" (15). The *Brut* may well have been popular,

¹Larousse (Dictionnaire de l'ancien français. Paris, 1986) defines *vasse* "n.f. (1169, Wace; cf. francique *wazo*, motte de terre garnie d'herbe) Jachère." The pronunciation in Norman French would have been identical with the author's name.

the poem being read aloud to encourage Norman knights to greater valor, "even fair ladies used to read it in hospitals to knights wounded in tournaments, in order to quiet their pains" (Payen-Payne 11), although its use as a panacea remains suspect.

There are far fewer copies of the *Rou* than of the *Brut*: the longest section is found in three manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries now in Paris and London, and the complete poem in a sixteenth-century copy by Duchesne of a medieval manuscript. If one does accept the premise that extant manuscripts indicate popularity, the conclusion must be that the *Rou* never equalled the *Brut*'s success. Factors other than the existence of manuscripts can lead to the same conclusion: the *Rou*, though fourteen years in the making, was never completed, and when its author finally abandoned it, he no longer enjoyed royal patronage. Moreover, the twenty years that had passed since the *Brut* appeared encompassed a period of great development in literary taste which the *Rou* fails to reflect. Nevertheless, the *Rou* has its admirers who consider its twelve-syllable lines the height of Wace's poetic achievement.

One might well ask how a French writer can occupy a place of importance in the history of English literature. The answer lies with the Normandy and Plantagenet dynasties, the most powerful rulers in Western Europe during the second

half of the eleventh and the whole of the twelfth century when they held sovereignty over "la terre marage / Entre Espagne e Ecosse de rivage en rivage" (Rou CA 35-36). William the Conqueror not only brought with him to England a system of laws and administration to impose on his British subjects; he introduced, as well, the French spoken in Normandy, making it the court language of Britain for the next three centuries. Although French may not have been adopted by the English lower classes, its reading public was broader than that which understood Latin. Because the Normans were pragmatic and innovative, and William's descendants needed a historical basis for consolidating their position in England, it was natural for them to adopt French rather than Latin for histories and story-telling. Women preferred French, many of them having no education in Latin, a not-insignificant factor in the use of the vernacular since "great ladies were the chief patrons of the early Anglo-Norman writers" (Legge 7).

Royalty and nobility alike encouraged writers of whom the better-known included, besides Wace, Benedeit, whose *Navigation de saint Brendan* was written at the request of Henry I's Queen Aliz; Geoffrey Gaimar, author of the now-lost *Estorie des Bretons* and the later *Estorie des Engles* (1147-51) written at the request of Constance, Lady FitzGilbert; Benoit de Sainte-Maure, Wace's arch-rival at the

court of Henry II; Marie de France, mistress of the *lai* or short tale; and the acknowledged master of the medieval romance, Chrétien de Troyes, who wrote under the patronage of Eleanor's daughter, Marie de Champagne.

Twelfth-century writers played an important role beyond their contribution to literature; as suggested above, there was a political motive and a societal basis for tales to be written in the vernacular. The Normans wanted their own heroes, embraced within the framework of their own literature, to stir them, to satisfy their pride, and to reflect their ideals and aspirations. Not least, in the eyes of King Henry II, was the need to cement his hereditary right to the throne of England, hence the need for writers to fix his place in history. And within one hundred years of the Norman conquest of Britain, written accounts of the commingled races would allow Anglo-Normans to bask in the glory of their ancestors' achievements.

By the mid-twelfth century, these histories began to appear in a new poetic form appealing to the tastes of an audience that appreciated refinement and elegance. The romance or *romanz* had little in common with today's notion of romance as a story of love thwarted and gained; on the other hand, it disowned much of the style, content and aims of the epic, a long exalted narrative poem usually concentrated around a heroic figure and a national identity. The word

roman was employed as noun, adjective and adverb to signify: the spoken vernacular as opposed to the more formal language of Latin. Indeed, it was sometimes used to indicate simply a spoken utterance, and by extension, any composition, literary or technical, couched in a "romance" i.e. continental French or Anglo-Norman, speech. In origin, therefore, *romanz* meant the linguistic medium of the illiterate, that is, of those who could not read or write Latin, and, by synecdoche, any work composed in that medium. These senses emerge in the context of a developing alternative culture to that of the Church, a culture which is not essentially serious, didactic and ecclesiastical, but imaginative, playful, and secular. (Hunt 10)

The *roman* began to assume the meaning of a genre distinct from chronicles and saints' lives as early as Wace, and under Chrétien took on its modern meaning of a tale of knightly prowess, usually set in remote times or places and involving elements of the fantastic or supernatural.

The "alternative culture" responsible for engendering this striking literary evolution of around 1150, was associated with the court, and the product--*littérature courtoise*--influenced and was influenced by the elegance and politeness of the courtly manner. While the poets reflected

the life of the court, the court affected the forms of poetic style and versification, the epic's long monorhymed strophe giving way to the octosyllabic couplet. But courtly literature was determined less by form than by its moral and psychological content (Frappier *Rom. Bret.* 88), for writers of romances and lyric poets made a serious attempt to analyze feelings, rather than merely recount men's deeds; the clashing armies of the *Chanson de Roland* gave way to the two-man jousts of *Erec et Enide*; the passion of *fin'amour* firing the hearts of knights and ladies alike succeeded the mutual enmity of Christian and pagan. As a genre in transition, the mid-twelfth century *roman* incorporated the story-telling quality and sense of adventure of the epic with the realistic description of events found in the history or chronicle. It grew out of these forms, feeding on translations of the classics, nourished by Celtic legends, but less concerned than its predecessors with drawing moralistic conclusions:

Lorsqu'aux environs de 1150 le roman se détachera, comme un fruit mûr de l'arbre, des chroniques insipides de la génération précédente, lorsque Wace refoulera dans l'obscurité Geoffroy de Monmouth, tout en le suivant d'assez près, le romanesque se dégagera enfin, de la gangue étroite et frigide où il était enfermé. (Wilmotte 10)

Wace, as Wilmotte suggests, was a potent force in initiating the new literary form. He treats his historical subjects in a manner that seems to combine the serious, didactic and ecclesiastical with the imaginative, playful and secular, to use Hunt's juxtaposition. Like his three saints' lives, which are obviously serious, didactic and ecclesiastical, Wace's two *romans* have a serious purpose, to trace the history of the British and the background of the dukes of Normandy, and to teach his contemporaries about their own forbears. Scorning the dry monachal style of his predecessors, Wace attempts in his *romans* to bring this past to life with a vivid imagination, occasional pungent humor, and a somewhat jaded eye while at the same time priding himself on historical accuracy.

Writing as he did, when he did, Wace had a significant effect on the development of medieval literature. Chapter I begins the examination of his contribution by surveying the man's personal history and early works.

Chapter I

Wace: His Early Writings

Se l'on demande qui ço dist,
qui ceste estorie en romanz fist,
jo di e dirai que jo sui
Wace de l'isle de Garsui,
qui est en mer vers occident,
al fieu de Normendie apent.
En l'isle de Garsui fui nez,
a Chaem fui petiz portez,
illoques fui a letres mis,
pois fui longues en France apris;
quant jo de France repairai
a Chaem longues conversai,
de romanz faire m'entremis,
mult en escriis et mult en fis.
Par Deu aïe e par le rei
--altre fors Deu servir ne dei--
m'en fu donee, Deus li rende,
a Baieues une provende.
Del rei Henri segont vos di,
nevo Henri, pere Henri. (Rou III 5299-318)

All that we know of Wace is to be found within his poems.
The preceding excerpt, representing almost all the

biographical details available, was written near the close of his career when he may have wished to leave behind more than a record of only other people's lives. To guarantee that something of his own biography survived, Wace wove his own life into the poem, unfortunately omitting his birthdate, which, scholars speculate,¹ falls between 1090 and 1110, with 1100 being the date commonly accepted.

The name "Wace" or "Guace" possibly comes from the Teutonic Wazo, an older form of the modern French Gace or Gasse, or as some would have it, the vernacular form of Eustache (Payen-Payne 5). Wace appears to have had no other name, single names being a not-uncommon occurrence in the twelfth century; before the reign of Henry II, surnames were rare though not unknown. The persistent attempts to tack on a Christian name, whether Robert, Richard, or Matthieu, should have been blocked by Paris' unequivocal statement that Wace is a personal and not a family name (594), but this misunderstanding continues to this day.²

Jersey, the island on which Wace was born, lies fourteen miles from the coast of Normandy. It was then part of the Duchy and would remain so for another hundred years, until King John lost the continental part of his domaine, retaining

¹Paris puts his birth date at 1100, while Holmes thinks that because he was still active after 1170 a later date would be more appropriate, as does Holden, who opts for 1110.

²"Robert" was added by Huet through a misreading of a line in St. Nicholas, and scholars including de la Rue, who points out the error (51), and Barron (288) have continued the misappellation.

only *Les Iles de la Manche*. From his boyhood on an island, Wace gained first-hand knowledge of the sea and sea-going craft, information he put to good use later in detailed descriptive maritime descriptions.

Wace's ancestry may or may not have been humble: some sources (Salmon 1159) think he was of "noble race," his mother the daughter of Toustein, chamberlain to Robert I of Normandy.¹ Or Wace may have been the son of a carpenter who helped to construct the fleet for the Norman Conquest,² or who knew those who had participated and passed on their recollections to his son.³

Although Wace's origins are uncertain, scholars have attempted to claim that his sympathy for the nobles when faced with a peasants' revolt indicates a noble background.⁴ The firmest evidence for upper class lineage lies with the fact of his being sent away to be educated: as a child, Wace was sent to Caen in Normandy to learn Latin ("a letres mis"), then to the Ile-de-France, probably Paris and possibly Chartres, both great international schools, for a long period

¹Paris (526-27) interpreted "Tosteins, ki ert ses chamberlencs... de par sa mere fu sis aives" (Rou III 3233-35) to read "de par ma mere fu sis aives."

²Based on the supposition that his father was an eye-witness to preparations for the Conquest ("mai jo oi dire a mon pere--bien m'en sovient, mais vaslet ere" Rou III 6423-24).

³If Wace's father had taken part in the Conquest he would have been rather advanced in age to have a young son (Taylor xvi-xvii).

⁴See Paris 595. Le Saux (57) refers to Wace's "disparaging comments on the peasantry." By contrast, the author's distaste for the intemperance of Count Raul (Rou III 815-958) can be taken as an indication of the court's growing unease with demesure.

of study. The farmers and fishermen who composed the population of Jersey could not have aspired to higher education except by seeking to enter the priesthood. If Wace had come from a seigneurial family, there would be reason to expect some record of that fact, and the threat of poverty that hung over his head throughout his lifetime would have been diminished. A background as a member of the petty nobility, with a respect for education and the need to make a living, might best describe his circumstances.

The choice of Caen for the young boy's education may have been more than expedient, that is, more than simply a matter of providing his elementary education in a centre not far from Jersey. There were in Caen at that time, two celebrated schools, one founded by Lanfranc (later Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England) and emphasizing philosophy and religion, the other, established by the no-less-celebrated Arnoul Malcouronne, and having a more historical and literary direction. Malcouronne, or "mauvaise tonsure," earned his nickname by teaching *littérature profane*, that is, literature outside "divine letters" (philosophy, scholastic and theology).²

Around 1130 Wace returned to Caen and became *clerc lisant*, an ecclesiastical position with unspecified duties generally thought to have included writing, composing, and

²Mancel and Trebutien are led by the kind of work Wace produced to suspect that he belonged to Arnoul's school (xi-xii).

reading aloud.¹ "To read" in the Middle Ages meant to teach publicly; a *maistre lisant* would indicate an authoritative teacher.² In the Latin of the charters, teachers were indicated as "magister" or "magister scholarum." Wace, it may be supposed, was a *clerc lisant* who became a *maistre lisant*, the Maistre Wace who names himself fifteen times in his writings, proudly using the designation "maistre" ten times to indicate that he was, as Tatlock (464) claims, a professional man, proud of his occupation and of his standing within it. In fact, he was a man of many overlapping professions: teacher, translator, historian, poet, canon--evidently winning the respect of his peers in each of these fields.

Wace's position as a man of letters, well-versed in the classical culture that formed the basis of the new learning, made him quick to grasp the opportunity to serve as translator for the laity, in an era when to translate went beyond the modern meaning of transposing a text into another language: besides interpreting the Latin words in French, to translate meant to transfer material from one written form into another, changing the style in the process.³ Wace, who

¹Legge (555) suggests that such a clerk, while in Holy Orders, was not necessarily a priest. Holden (3, 215) adds the duties of notary to those of secretary.

²Lyons (224-25) thinks that both clerc lisant and maistre lisant refer to a teacher in ecclesiastical schools whose authority is to be accepted on points of learning.

³For further discussion of the nature of translation at this time, see Durling, "Translation and Innovation in the Roman de Brut."

uses the term "translate" on several occasions,¹ was among the first to use it to refer to linguistic translation as opposed to the literal sense of transfer. Translation, as he understood the term, allowed him to flesh out or edit his source material, and to conflate from two or more written texts as well as, on occasion, to incorporate oral material, always being careful to indicate that the material was indeed oral.

Wace, with his sound grounding in the classics gained at church schools and his facility for composition, was well placed to become one of Normandy's great men of letters. Initially he supplemented his income from teaching by writing pious tracts and *serventois* (a common type of political poem, sometimes humorous, praising or denouncing an outstanding character, or an observation on an important event).² As he grew more confident as a poet, he extended his range to include the lives of saints, astutely choosing the most popular legends and diligently translating them from the Latin. The stories of the saints found a ready audience among the Normans, whose principal interests were warfare and religion. To convert others to their beliefs, to convince them of the merits and power of the saint whose festival was being held, and to enhance their own prestige, well-to-do

¹Brut 7, 3346, 7539, Roy II 1357, III 152.

²The first mention of this term occurs in Wace. There is no agreement on its exact meaning, differing interpretations being given by Tatlock 464, Pelan Partie 22, and Holmes 56, 60.

lords and ladies would commission homilies in verse from clerks like Wace who would gladly oblige:

Quant nos la fest célébrons,
 Droiz est qu l'estoire en disons.
 Bien fait le fest à célébrer,
 Bien fait l'estoire à raconter. (*Conception* 9)

These verses, Wace tells us, would be read outside the Church, or from the podium or *puy* within it, "for those who are illiterate or have not heard," by clerks whose duty it was to explain laws, speak of saints, and say why each festival was held (*Saint Nicholas* 1-5).

In *Vie de Sainte Marguerite*, considered to be his earliest extant work, Wace exhibits one of his more marked attributes, selecting from various sources and conflating these sources with a care for order and presentation. His choice of the life of Saint Margaret of Antioch, whose relics were distributed among various shrines in 1098, was a response to the need for an explanation of her life; Wace obliged for a fee. He suggests that ladies should love her very much (737) and voices the plea that was to reappear in successive legends:

Se feme est en travail d'enfant
 E par besong m'aut reclamant,
 Biau sire Deus, lur priere oie
 L'un et l'autre met a vee.

(*Ste. Marg.* 645-48)

Modern editors of Wace's works have remarked on his striking attention to detail, which makes his stories both realistic and believable. Francis lists several modifications to the legend of Saint Margaret, "without doubt" imagined by Wace (viii n.2); these additions include a description of Olibrius' retinue, "Grant compaigne de chevaliers / Menoit od lui et de somiers" (95-96), and the flooding of sunlight into the saint's cell to dramatize her response to the dragon:

N'avoit encor pas tot ce dit,
 Quant le soleil reluire vit
 Dedens la chartre ou ele estoit,
 Ou ele le dragon tenoit. (383-86)

Both additions, the description of a large company of knights with their laden horses and the mysterious and symbolic appearance of sunshine in the saint's prison cell, are characteristic of a poet writing for an audience appreciative of chivalry and of miracles. Yet Wace's style remains restrained, even austere, as his description of Marguerite, "assés fu gente et assés bele . . . que bien resanbla margerie / De sa biauté et de sa vie," makes clear. Subsequent versions of the legend, including those in English verse and alliterative prose, Italian, and even Latin, allow the possibility of influence, direct or indirect, from Wace,

for the detail relating to women in childbirth was borrowed from a second Latin source which he seems to have been unique in using. If this is the case, the extent of his influence on the hagiographic tradition was broad indeed.

The straightforward re-telling in his native tongue of a biography from two Latin sources presented a challenge that Wace easily met and conquered, making certain to add his signature in the closing lines¹:

Ci faut sa vie, ce dit Grace,

Qui de latin en romans mist

Ce que Theodimus escrist. (740-42 Ms. M)

After completing the life of Saint Margaret, Wace was ready to "translate" a more ambitious work.² The Feast of the Conception of the Virgin, December 8, established in 1145, became one of the most widely celebrated holy days in Normandy. Wace's poem on the subject may have been written about 1140 as propaganda for the feast, during an age when the celebration would have met with opposition.³ The fact that the festival was promoted by Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury and former Abbot of Bec, near Caen, may account for the popularity it achieved in both England and Normandy.

¹The inclusion of his name added authenticity and accountability, though there may be extant early works written before he had established the signature technique (Holden 3, 16).

²The life of Saint George, formerly attributed to Wace, is now thought to be by Simund de Freine (Brut lxxv n.1).

³Approval of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception was granted in England by 1129 but withheld in Normandy until 1145 (Holmes 59).

*L'Etablissement de la fête de la Conception Nôtre-Dame*¹ is a compilation of three different legends that would have been initially recited separately. The first recounts the miracle of Helsin, Abbot of Ramsey, who travels on a mission to Denmark for William the Conqueror. A storm threatens to wreck his ship as he is returning to England; he averts the danger by promising God to initiate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The second legend tells of Joachim and Anna, the couple to whom Mary is born, and the circumstances of her birth, education, and marriage. The third describes Mary's death and assumption.

Wace shows himself to be diligent in his research and confident in his abilities by freely translating from several sources, and by introducing the life with a brief history lesson concerning William's conquest of Britain (attributing castles to Britain which he knew were not built before the Conquest). In other respects there is little to distinguish *Conception* from other saints' lives written at this period.

Wace's third poem is a life of Saint Nicholas, another popular figure whose bones reputedly were carried to Bari by Norman sailors. Written as a commission and dedicated to Robert Fitz Tiout ("al oēs Robert le fiz tiout / Qui seint Nicholas mult amout" 1478-79), this poem is based in part on Latin texts ("En romanz voil dire un petit / De ceo que nus

¹The poem was published in the nineteenth century under the title La Vie de la Vièrge Marie.

le latin dit" 41-42), in part on oral tales ("Nus ne trovons tuz ceuz escrit / Ne nos nes avons tuz oiz" 1484-85). The anecdotal *Saint Nicholas* presents a more complicated structure than the two earlier chronological lives, and employs several stylistic features (repetition, antithesis, and inversion) that recur in Wace's later works. Once again he describes a storm at sea, prefiguring two storm scenes in the *Brut*, especially that in which Urséle and 11,000 virgins are shipwrecked; the description in *St. Nicholas* of the storm's effects on sky and waves progresses in the *Brut* to a description of its effects on human suffering. Wace introduces a technical variation that he continues in his longer works: to avoid monotony, he adapts the octosyllabic couplet to the strophic meter, so that the same end-rhyme carries through successive couplets.

Certain references, including information about the goddess Diana, found in the source of *Saint Nicholas* but not in Geoffrey's *Historia*, reappear in the *Brut*, leading Arnold to date the writing of this saint's life near to 1155 (lxxvii). This reasoning is unconvincing. Wace might well have written the Nicholas legend five or ten years earlier, given that the writing of the *Brut* must have occupied most of his time for several years.¹

As a series of anecdotes, *St. Nicholas* lacks

¹Holmes (62) calculates that the *Brut* took four or five years to compose so that Wace would have had to start it in 1150 or 1151.

cohesiveness, the saint himself supplying the only unifying element; as a series of miracles, the poem is notable for the effects it would produce on its audience, not for any development of character or theme. But Wace's saints' lives, far from being "too unimportant to deserve very much consideration" (Carpenter 169), are signposts to his later style. The rhetorical methods already mentioned, the brisk pace of the octosyllabic couplets and the instructive tone he invokes in these early lives feature in the later, longer poems; his vocabulary becomes richer with each poem; he introduces his favorite descriptive subjects and themes (storms at sea, tears, and the fickleness of fortune) which, though not unusual in themselves, regularly recur in his later works; in *Saint Nicholas* he ventures to record tales from the oral tradition, a departure which has a bearing on his later writings; and he satisfies his need to instruct by working history into ecclesiastical material.

History and poetry were not then mutually exclusive. The distinction between various kinds of writers and the genres they worked in was less fine in the twelfth century than it was to become. Wace's role, his livelihood, was to make history accessible to the illiterate through the medium of poetry; vernacular prose histories would come later. The medieval story-teller's art was executed in verse; not unnaturally, the more skilful the verse, the more acceptable

the story. The distortions of recorded events that occurred through the oral tradition, as generations of minstrels (*jongleurs*) elaborated tales from the past, did not suddenly cease when narratives like Wace's, based on written records, came to be written. The difficulty in getting information even on recent events "meant that the majority of historical works had to be spun out with curious trash" (Bloch 90). Paradoxically, the very fact of their respect for the past led people to reconstruct it as they considered it ought to have been (92).

To explain and elucidate in a poetic way must involve the imagination as well as the intellect: poetical exegesis was not chicanery. Holden points out that the aesthetics of the time encouraged adornment and embellishment of parts of the story concerned with battles--single-handed combat and imaginary feats of arms could be attributed legitimately to an historic personage--with parleys, where the poet was free to invent remarks, and with topographical details (115). The poet in Wace, a self-conscious artist, made full use of imaginative talent within the confines of historical subject matter.

For their poetic narratives writers like Wace adapted Latin histories of doubtful veracity; that source information was recorded in Latin was proof enough that it was true, and though a writer might have his own personal doubts about the

accuracy of his sources--why else would Wace feel compelled to emphasize their veracity?--the audience was usually unconcerned. When authors amplified their material through their personal gifts of invention or through oral sources, they always protested their faithfulness to a little-known but valid source, as Geoffrey of Monmouth felt obliged to do in his *Historia* (Arnold/Pelan *Partie* 17).

Wace speaks of his writings as *romans*, *gestes*, *estoires* and *contes*, referring to himself only as a *clerc lisant* or *maistre*, but one who translates, interprets, writes, and tells. The term *romanceor* to describe a writer in the vernacular was first used by Chrétien de Troyes around 1175.¹ Although Wace does not speak of himself as a romancer, Francis (xv) places the three saints' lives in the category of romance on the basis of Wace's introduction ("Dit m'est et rové que en face / De seint Nicholas un romanz"). While his use of the term on this occasion probably refers to the language of the work, Wace clearly comes to think of romance as not simply any work composed in the vernacular, for he repeats the term in the *Rou* ("Mais or(e) puis jeo lunges penser, / livres escrire e translater, / faire rumanz e serventeis" III 151-53).² Wace, as one of the first writers

¹As defined in the Dictionnaire de l'ancien français p.571. Current research indicates a dating of 1185.

²Holmes (56) considers that the contrast between rumanz and serventeis indicates that the term romance "no longer meant just anything composed in the vulgar tongue." Durling (13) supports this view.

to distinguish the romance as a genre, has set a puzzle by failing to clarify exactly what he means by the term. His stated purpose in the lives was to make clerical material available to those who could not read Latin; in the longer poems he stresses the need to record history so that future generations would remember the acts, the sayings and the customs ("les feiz e les diz e les murs" *Rou* III 2) of their ancestors. The romance must have had distinctive characteristics to separate it, in Wace's mind, from his other poetry. One must remember that a gap of as much as twenty or twenty-five years separated the writing of *St. Nicholas* and the *Rou*, part III, making it more than possible that Wace's use of *romanz* in the former meant a story in the vernacular, but by the time the *Rou* was written had come to indicate a new genre, a genre that captured the mood of the period. In this case, Chrétien's reference to *romanceors*¹ would be a logical outgrowth of the term: *romanceors* wrote romances. Since Wace never describes himself as *romanceor* or *romancier*, only as a *clerc* and *maistre lisant* who writes romances, the implication is that during the interval between his romances and those of Chrétien, the term "romance" had taken on an added connotation.

Wace's saints' lives have certain characteristics in

¹"De si vaillant romans ne fine/Chertains soient rommancheoir/Conques plus conter en nul jour/Nen oyrent ne ja norront/Se menchones trouver ni vont" *Yvain* 6820-24, Ms. Γ, B.N. 1433.

common with romances: they are written in octosyllabic couplets in the vernacular, and reflect in a limited way twelfth-century mores and ideals; they focus on the individual and his or her individual trials and triumphs, these victories won by faith in God (loyalty to one's lord being the foremost feudal quality), exalting Him and immortalizing His servant. But here the polarization of right and wrong, good and bad, is clearly defined, whereas the heroes and villains of Wace's *romans* are often an admixture of qualities. The saints are invariably good from birth to death, judging from Wace's three examples, with no room to develop as their faith is tested repeatedly and they work their wonders with God's grace. There is no evidence in these lives of "the tension created by the coexistence of an idealistic and a critical spirit," which, in Hunt's view, unambiguously marks off the romance [of Chrétien's period] from the saint's life (21). And yet Wace is concerned with new literary devices, new ways of "telling" that will appeal to the interests of his contemporaries and lead very soon to a new genre and to what Kär calls a romantic school of writers (324). The saints' lives demonstrated that Wace could capture and hold an audience; they built for him a reputation and a following. The time was ripe to write a major work, and he had not far to look for his source: Geoffrey's popular Latin history of the kings of Britain.

Chapter II

Roman de Brut

When Wace chose to adapt into the vernacular Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, he did so with the knowledge that the Latin version was very popular among those with enough education to read it. Although French adaptations of the *Historia* had already appeared,¹ he was confident of his ability to improve on them, perhaps even hopeful of attracting royal patronage: a history linking ancient Greece and Rome with the Saxon and Celtic predecessors of the Anglo-Norman monarchs was sure to appeal to the nobility.² The *Historia* was appealing also because it presented a Latin--and therefore authoritative--source for some of the Arthurian tales being told throughout Europe. This Matter of Britain, as it came to be called, was familiar to the courts in the form of a series of independent episodes; here was the opportunity for Wace to elaborate on Geoffrey's example, joining together the historical and the mythical to reflect more closely the ideals of Anglo-Norman society while making the content more accessible than Geoffrey's narrative.

History (fact) and story (fable) were so intertwined in the twelfth century that audiences did not distinguish

¹Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estorie des Engles*, the Munich *Brut* and the Harley *Brut*, all composed before 1151, were eclipsed by Wace's *Brut*. For more information see Frappier 65-66.

²His motivation could have been partly financial: as Shichtman dryly notes, the writing of secular history was more rewarding than hagiography (109).

between them, relying on learned clerks, like Wace, with a knowledge of Latin, to promulgate what they had found buried within manuscripts. Oral material, while it might contain a grain of truth--"ne tut mençunge, ne tut veir, / Tut folie ne tut saveir" (9793-94)--was highly suspect in the view of such writers as Wace, who cast aspersions on *jongleurs* (minstrels) and *conteurs* (storytellers):

Tant unt li cunteür cunté

E li fableür tant flablé

Pur lur cuntés enbeleter,

Que tut unt fait fable sembler. (*Brut* 9795-98)

The Matter of Britain blended fable and fact into narrative literature highly appealing to twelfth-century tastes, and though its historicity might be suspect, it was at least as valid as the legend of Brutus as founder of Britain, the starting point of Wace's first long poem, known as both *Geste des Bretons*, as he titled it, and *Roman de Brut*, as his contemporaries called it. The Celtic legends, whether they originated in Ireland or Brittany, circulated on the lips of *jongleurs* into Britain and Northern France, even extending into Italy and Spain. Because of their widespread popularity, these tales deserved to be recorded. Even Wace, skeptical of their truth, was forced to acknowledge their existence: "Arthur, si la gest ne ment..." (*Brut* 13275), "E les aventures truvees / Ki d'Artur sunt tant recuntees / Ke a

fable sunt aturnees" (9790-92). In fact, he could not have ignored the tales of Uther and Arthur and still have fulfilled his role as "translator" of his principal source; almost one-third of his *Brut* recounts the Arthurian legend. But Wace did what the oral legends could not do:

By structuring the *Brut* chronologically, "de rei en rei, de eir en eir," and by weaving together threads from both written and oral sources, Wace gave his audience what they could not have found in scattered oral legends, whether in French or Welsh: a vast, comprehensive network of "facts."

(Blacker-Knight 65)

These "facts" were factual only in that they were based primarily on a Latin source; the legends had gained credibility through their universality, largely because their hearers wanted to believe them. . . they represented an idealized life beyond the confines of the keep as lived by lords and ladies who conducted themselves courteously.

Geoffrey's act of writing in Latin was enough to transmogrify his sources into authentic material. He was vague about these sources, claiming that he drew on an old Welsh book, *vetustissimus liber*, given him by Walter of Oxford, which, if it existed at all, might have fathered a number of *Bruts* written in Welsh (Frappier 66). None of these versions, however, is the complete

translation/adaptation of Geoffrey's history that is Wace's text; in addition, these Welsh translations are replete with details borrowed from Welsh legends. Wace, not content to draw on only one source, amplified the *Brut* with material drawn from the Bible, saints' lives, and possibly the *Historia Britonum*, Gaimar's *Estorie des Engleis*, and William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (*Brut* lxxix).¹ He introduced additional facts from these sources to enrich Geoffrey's history without departing radically from it.

Besides the virtual guarantee of a good reception for his adaptation and the availability of a respected source of oral as well as written material, Wace may have had another reason for undertaking a poem of nearly 15,000 lines. Scholars debate whether or not his purpose was political. Either he was fully in accord with Geoffrey, sharing his political ideas and wanting to invest the Normans with illustrious ancestors, painting Arthur as the ideal king, the equal of Charlemagne and Alexander (*Pelan Partie* 30), or his work differed substantially in political bias, tone, and representation of character from Geoffrey's (*Blacker-Knight* 55). Pelan argues that both the *Historia* and its vernacular translation strongly contributed to the transformation of Arthur into a chivalrous king surrounded by an elegant and

¹Robert Caldwell has discovered details in the variant version of Geoffrey's *Historia* that Arnold thought were drawn from the *Aeneid* and the *Historia Romana* [*Speculum* xxxi (1956), 676 f.1.

refined court, devoted to the cult of beauty, valor and love (30). Arthur is, in both works, more the majestic hero than he will ever be again, future *romanciers* giving him a secondary, passive, or even ridiculous role.

Blacker-Knight's thesis makes of the *Historis* an impassioned plea for a strong, united rule in England, and of the *Brut* a dispassionate account of the shifts in power, with Arthur a courtly rather than a political hero in British history (59). Geoffrey's message of strength and peace through unity was written at a time of civil war between claimants to the throne of England; Wace's translation, however, was written for a courtly audience wishing to be entertained during a settled period in Anglo-Norman affairs. Geoffrey is disposed to draw moral and political instruction from his history, stating in the introduction that the Britons lost Britain by reason of pride, divine vengeance overtaking and forcing them to yield to the Picts and Scots. Their pride led to battles that split the empire. His book is a warning and a call for a united front. Wace, in contrast, states his theme in the opening eight lines: to trace the order of kings from age to age. His emphasis is on mutability, the unrelenting nature of change, his tone accepting and compassionate, not impassioned or wistful, his goal instruction and enjoyment.

Wace's purpose was partly political, however, not in the sense of uniting warring factions behind one leader but

in a more personal sense: the *Brut* would prove useful to Henry II, a vigorous man intent on putting his own *imprimatur* on a newly-acquired realm. No doubt Henry believed that the kingdom was his by right of maternal succession, and that all those whose liege he was must be made to understand this fact. His subjects included the Anglo-Saxons and Celts in Britain already brought under the aegis of the Norman dukes by William the Conqueror. A written account linking Henry with the founders of the line of British monarchs would be a highly desirable testimony to his rightful inheritance. The opportunity this presented for a shrewd, practical, and ambitious man of letters was not lost on Wace, especially when a reliable and popular source already existed in Latin. Wace must certainly have begun work on the *Brut* before Henry was anointed in 1154, finishing it within a year of the coronation, and presenting it as a courtly gesture to Henry's queen, Eleanor.¹

Wace bridged the gulf stretching from Geoffrey's *Historia*, with its emphasis on the political and dynastic concerns of the age, to Chrétien's romances wherein the Arthurian world was no more than a backdrop to the adventures of individual knights. In the *Brut* he provided the nexus between the two forms, enlarging the elements of *courtoisie*

¹Wace's *Brut* is sometimes considered, and not correctly, a commission from the Queen. Layamon's prologue says only that Wace gave his book to the noble Eleanor.

suggested in the *Historia*, introducing material from non-literary sources, and re-creating Arthur in the image of an ideal twelfth-century monarch. This conception of Arthur, among the more important of Wace's alterations to Geoffrey's material, is "essentially that of the chivalric romances. . . which Geoffrey, while he felt or foreshadowed its influence, did not by any means fully represent" (Fletcher 137).

Geoffrey incorporated certain acts, expressions, and emotions into his account which set it apart from the work of earlier historiographers like the Venerable Bede and Dudo of St. Quentin. He kept only the traits of Arthur that agreed with his own conception, making of him a proud and dignified figure and a tragic hero:

En fait il n'y avait donc encore en 1155, ni légende courtoise d'Arthur ni, surtout, littérature courtoise d'Arthur. Geoffrey de Monmouth d'abord, en dépouillant la tradition de ses éléments les plus grossiers pour ne retenir que les exploits héroïques d'Arthur et en amplifiant de toutes manières la geste du roi et de ses fidèles Keu, Beduer et Gauvain, -- puis Wace, en mettant en octosyllabes français assez alertes l'oeuvre du chroniqueur gallois, ont jeté les bases premières de la grande légende arthurienne dans ses éléments essentiels et dans son organisation générale, telle

qu'elle était encore, sommaire mais riche de possibilités, lorsque d'autres, parmi lesquels Marie de France, l'auteur du *Tristan* et plus tard Chrétien de Troyes, se penchèrent sur elle pour la féconder de leur génie poétique. (Delbouille 199)

These words seem at first to contradict the facts as the Norman poet presents them: Wace makes several references to the fables and stories in circulation about King Arthur and his knights, and assumes that his audience is familiar with them (so familiar, it seems, that Wace does not bother to repeat sections of the legend dealing with Arthur's campaign in France or Merlin's prophecies). Yet Delbouille's insistence on the word *courtois* must be understood as meaning that the legends then in circulation were in the mold of the *chanson de geste* or epic, not in the more refined, less *farouche* style of Wace. By supplying the date 1155, Delbouille marks out the beginning of both courtly legend and courtly literature; 1155 was, significantly, the year the *Brut* appeared. Geoffrey's heroic Arthur is still an action-oriented figure, an uncompromising leader; it remains for Wace to add a few softer contours, and the psychological element of sympathy which is in no way at odds with the courteous ruler. Together, Geoffrey and Wace, as Delbouille claims, lay the foundations for the courtly Arthurian literature on which *romanciers* will shortly build.

The two authors have varying conceptions of what constitutes a courtly hero, evident in their introductions to the fabled British king. Wace writes:

Juvençels esteit de quinze anz,
 De sun eage fors e granz.
 Les thecches Artur vus dirrai,
 Neient ne vus en mentirai;
 Chevaliers fu mult vertuus,
 Mult fu preisanz, mult glor'us,
 Cuntre orguillus fu orguillus
 E cuntre humles dulz e pitus;
 Forz e hardiz e conqueranz,
 Large dunere e despendanz;
 E sa busuinnus le requist,
 S'aidier li pout, ne l'escundist.
 Mult ama preis, mult ama gloire,
 Mult volt ses faiz mettre en memoire,
 Servir se fist curteisement
 Si ce cuntint mult noblement.
 Tant cum il vesqui e regna
 Tuz altres princes surmunta
 De curteisie e de noblesce
 E de vertu e de largesce. (9013-32)

In contrast, Geoffrey states, "At the time Arthur was a youth of fifteen years, of a courage and generosity beyond compare,

whereunto his inborn goodness did lend such grace as that he was beloved of well-nigh all the peoples in the land" (183), making no mention of tenderness or pity. He then paints the young king as being so prodigal in giving that his funds run short, forcing him to harry the Saxons "to the end that with their treasure he might make rich the retainers that were of his own household." Geoffrey's Arthur begins his reign less the courtly knight than Wace's, with motives less noble, slightly blighted by signs of *démesure*.

After twelve years of peace in Britain, Arthur determines to conquer the continent for reasons that differ widely in the *Historia* and the *Brut*. Geoffrey writes that as Arthur's fame spreads, and kings overseas repair their cities lest he attack, Arthur takes encouragement at being thought a terror, and determines to subdue the whole of Europe, first taking Norway where the Britons "give full loose to their cruelty" (195). Wace's Arthur decides to conquer France, not Europe, because of his valor, the counsel of his barons, and the strength of his mighty company of knights (9799-803). Wace presents Arthur's conquest of Norway with greater restraint than does Geoffrey, using it as the occasion to make a generous introduction to Walwain (Gawain), whom Geoffrey scarcely mentions.

As Arthur grows in age and experience, he sees less justification for the use of force in a cause that is not

reasonable or just, "[Florce n'est mie dreiture / Ainz est orguil e desmesure" (10829-30), unless one is protecting one's rights. The greatest challenge to his rights leads to his final battle with his nephew Modred, who through "felunie" has usurped the kingdom and through "vilainie" has stolen the love of Queen Guenevere. Haunted by shame at the memory of her sinfulness, Guenevere thinks it better to be dead than alive. She takes the veil in order to hide herself from the world. Mordred does not shrink from battle, preferring to risk death rather than flee continually from the field. Having reported the thoughts and feelings of the major players, Wace prefers to leave an aura of mystery hanging over the final fray:

Ne sai dire ki mielz le fist
 Ne qui perdi ne qui cunquist
 Ne qui chaf ne qui estut
 Ne qui ocist ne qui murut. (13259-62)

To Geoffrey's bald statement that King Arthur received deadly wounds and was borne to the island of Avalon to heal them, Wace raises the possibility of his return:

Encore i est, Bretun l'atendent,
 Si cum il dient e entendent;
 De la vendra, encor puet vivre (13279-81)

He then lends credence to popular beliefs by reiterating the doubts of Merlin surrounding Arthur's death:

Maistre Wace, ki fist cest livre,
 Ne volt plus dire de sa fin
 Qu'en dist li prophetes Merlin;
 Merlin dist d'Arthur, si ot dreit,
 Que sa mort dutuse serreit.
 Li prophetes dist verité;
 Tut tens en ad l'um puis duté,
 E datera, ço crei, tut dis,
 Se il est morz u il est vis. (13282-90)

In this instance he ranges beyond his Latin source to ally himself with a prophet "who tells the truth." Despite his protestations over not accepting hearsay, Wace here quotes as his authority none other than a wizard, but a wizard who has been proven right in that men continue to doubt Arthur's death.

Wace consistently reworks Geoffrey's material to mitigate brutishness and bloodthirstiness without reducing his kings to milksops or his knights to weaklings. Swords swash and heads roll, innocents are massacred by pagans and the flower of chivalry cut down, but horses are seldom slaughtered, Arthur's soldiers are not allowed to rob and pillage, and the dead enemy are treated with respect. The subjugated French regard Arthur as their lord, whether out of fear or to seek refuge, drawn to him by his wise speech, his largesse, and his noble spirit (9947-54), whereas Geoffrey

mentions only largesse as the reason French knights join his company (196). Worthy knights demand worthy opponents, and Arthur is never disappointed in this respect, encountering men like the Roman tribune Frolo:

Frolle fu mult de grant vigur;
Des nobles humes ert de Rome,
Ne dutot par sun cors nul hume. (9914-16)

Although his horse is cut from under him, Arthur defeats Frolo in hand-to-hand combat. During his nine-year sojourn in France, he subdues all parts of Gaul to his dominion, Geoffrey tells us, whereas Wace claims that Arthur works many marvels,² reproves many haughty men, and restrains many felons (10143-46), and here, then, is a subtle but significant difference in the two authors' points-of-view. Epic heroes destroy what they have defeated; courtly heroes use extraordinary powers to establish harmony.

An obvious example of Wace's efforts to bestow a courtly gloss on Arthur's battle scenes is found in the description of the Scottish campaign. Geoffrey's Arthur turns from the Irish, whom he cut to pieces without mercy, to attack the Scots and Picts, treating them with a cruelty "beyond compare . . . Not a single one that he could lay hands on did he spare" until the country's holy men plead with him on bended

²The reference to marvels may be an allusion to Arthur's adventures in France which Wace was loathe to introduce into Geoffrey's narrative for fear of sacrificing its verisimilitude (Brut lxxxvi).

knee to spare the "scanty few" that still survive, "to bear the yoke of perpetual bondage" (191). The *Brut*, on the other hand, has nothing of Arthur's wish to exterminate the Scots; as Arthur seeks them among their islands, they die "a vinz, a cenz e a milliers" from hunger as much as from the sword. The holy men who approach Arthur beseeching mercy are accompanied by the women of the country, barefoot, with streaming hair and torn clothing, their children in their arms. With tears and lamentations they fall at Arthur's feet, pleading with him to spare the fathers for pity of the children and mothers; they argue that they, like Arthur, are Christians who have had to suffer the Saxon incursions. "Vencu nus as, mais lai nus vivre," they beg. Arthur pardons them and accepts their homage (9476-521). In this scene Wace turns Arthur from a cruel, vengeful overlord moved to show mercy by the petition of holy men, into a persistent but just warrior-king, compassionate towards the weak, prepared to listen to reason, and forgiving of those who have wronged him. His *mesure* and courtliness in arms will be a model for Chrétien's romantic heroes.

The chivalric qualities of Arthur--generosity, fair play, *mesure* or self-discipline--are apparent as well in the gestures of many other characters, and in their appreciation of beauty, elegance, nobility and, to some extent, of women and their love as an ennobling and refining force.

In descriptions of nature, Geoffrey spares little thought for beauty; Maximien's description of Brittany in the *Brut* does not spring from any corresponding passage in the *Historia*:

Ceste contree est mult vaillant,
 Mult me semble bien guaaainable,
 E pienteive e delitable.
 Vei quels terres, vei quels rivieres,
 Vei quels forez, cum sunt plenieres;
 Grant plenté i ad de peissun
 E grant plenté de veneisun;
 Unches plus bel país ne vi. (5918-25)

When Hoel surveys the Scottish lakes in Geoffrey's work, he marvels at their numbers; in Wace's translation, Hoel marvels at their size, breadth and length, the number of marvellous islands and rocks, eagles and nests, "tut ad a merveille tenu / Quanque il ad illuec veü" (9527-36). These descriptions indicate a sensibility to landscape not apparent in Geoffrey, and provide a rationale for subsequent developments: Arthur's tale of other marvellous places, and Maximien's gift of Brittany to Cunan.

Lyric passages, though not abundant in Wace, are integral to the narrative, not superimposed upon it. When, for example, Belin lays an ambush for the Romans in the mountains between Germany and Rome,

Belin guaita si defendi
 Que en l'os n'ait noise ne cri;
 Bels fud li tens cum en esté
 Clere la nuit, l'air senz oré,
 La lune clere cler raia;
 Belin el val se resconsa;
 E li Romain tindrent lur rote
 Tut asseür, n'aveient dute;
 A la lune, ki cler luseit,
 S'en aloent a grant espleit,
 Quant desor l'aguait s'embatirent
 E a la lune luire virent
 Elmes e seles e escuz. (2997-3007)

Passages such as this are the more telling for their rarity; as Ker remarks, "The occasional visitations of the dreaming moods of romance, in the middle of a great epic or a great tragedy, are often more romantic than the literature which is nothing but romance from beginning to end" (321).

In describing the opulence of a court intended to reflect the power of its king, Geoffrey's skill pales beside that of his translator. Geoffrey's nobles march to Arthur's coronation "with such magnificence of equipment in trappings and mules and horses as may not easily be told" (200); Wace's French lords "furent de noble cuntenance, / de beles armes, de bels dras, / de bels lorains, de chevals gras" (10324-26).

Geoffrey makes no mention of the fair and noble ladies of the realm who wore rich cloaks over their silk gowns, each lady as beautiful as her fellows, delighting the eyes of all who gazed upon them. Wace details the rich girdles of many colors, the costly mantles, the precious jewels and rings, the furs and ornaments, of this gay and noble procession of ladies. Each carefully-chosen object builds towards an effect of exquisite refinement, of a kind that all the nobility of Henry and Eleanor's court would aspire to. In these painterly descriptions of luxurious appointments, Wace foreshadows what would become, in the later romances, similar portraits carried to exaggerated lengths. Here the result is neither scanty nor superfluous, exciting a taste for the elegance of court life without arousing repugnance for its vulgarity. Geoffrey's formulaic appreciation of female beauty is scarcely more fulsome than that found in the twelfth-century French epic; of Yguerne he writes, "[she] in beauty did surpass all the other dames of the whole of Britain" (17). Wace, whose restraint in describing female pulchritude was prompted by his greater appreciation of a lady's accomplishments and personal qualities, emphasizes Yguerne's nobility and goodness:

Nen ot plus bele en tut le regne;

Curteise esteit e bele e sage

E mult esteit de grant parage.

Li reis en ot oï parler

E mult l'aveit oï loer. (8574-78)

In describing Guenevere, Geoffrey uses the stock phrase: "[she] did surpass in beauty all the other dames of the island" (195). In Wace, Guenevere is:

Une cuinte e noble meschine;

Bele esteit e curteise e gente,

E as nobles Romains parente;

.....

Mult fu de grant afaitement

E de noble cuntienement,

Mult fu large e buone parliere (9646-47, 9653-55)

Department and ability, especially the acquisition of knowledge, are qualities Wace emphasizes; the description of Guincelin's queen, Marcie (Marcia)² is one example:

Lettree fu e sage dame,

De buen pris e de bone fame.

Sun enging mist tut e sa cure

A saveir lettre e esriture.

Mult sout e mult estudia,

Une lei escrit e trova,

Marcie l'apela l'on

Sulunc le language breton. (3337-44)

²Both Wace and Geoffrey credit her with the Marciana laws (De Myrcna Lage), although the name "Mercia" designates a territory, not a person (Brut n. 800).

Wace admires the qualities, apart from beauty, of the compassionate Cordeille and the well-read Eleine "ki mult sout d'art e de clergie" (5605). Among the rising generation of *romanciers*, extravagant descriptions as long as a hundred lines, analyzing every aspect of a lady's appearance according to the rules laid down by the *arts poétiques*, would displace the simple clarity of Wace's concise portraits.

Along with an appreciation of beauty, elegance and nobility, Wace's historical subjects are favored with unstinting generosity: giving (and receiving) are an essential characteristic of the courteous lord and lady. Geoffrey is conscious of the political uses of largesse:

[Brennius] neglected not the occasion to bind unto himself yet more closely those princes of the land whose friendship he had aforetime secured, by distributing largesse among them. (51-52)

Wace subtly emphasizes the effects of largesse upon human nature, wryly observing that Brenne's barons who already liked him, like him a little more because he gives them gifts (2686-89). Of all Brutus' successors none is more remarkable for his largesse than is Arthur, whose costly gifts signify his abundant wealth and whose bounty, according to Geoffrey, draws all men to his court (200). To this motive Wace adds that some men come to hear of the great king's courtesies, and others are drawn by the cords of love (10334-35).

Liberality ranks with valor, courtesy, and prowess among the qualities of Wace's heroic figures.

Another characteristic of the courtly knight, admiration and respect for ladies, finds early expression in both the *Historia* and the *Brut*, wherein jousting knights strive for victory before an appreciative gallery of *amies*. But the concept of ideal love is imperfectly developed and expressed in both works, as is illustrated by the less-than-courtly example of Uther Pendragon who abides by no social code of conduct when he falls under the spell of Yguerne: finding that he cannot wake or sleep, eat or drink, without having the lady on his mind, Uther has only one objective, to possess her. He seeks counsel from Ulfin, who, in the *Historia*, points out the physical difficulty of forcing entry into Tintagel, where Yguerne has been sequestered for safekeeping by her husband Gorlois. In the *Brut*, Ulfin is shocked by Uther's passion for Yguerne, and questions the morality of his actions:

Ore oi, ço dist Ulfin, merveilles.

Le cunte avez grevé de guerre

E a eissil metez sa terre,

E lui cloëz en cel chastel.

Quidez que sa feme en seit bel?

Sa feme amez, lui guerriez. (8668-73)

Ulfin's condemnation of Uther's infatuation is not, as one

might suppose, a reaction to the immorality of the proposed act; Wace recognizes here the feeling of his contemporaries towards Uther's flagrant breach of *courtoisie*, his *démesure*. The open display of illicit passion which goes unremarked in Geoffrey cannot be ignored by a poet reflecting the concerns of courtly life. He cannot alter the story by changing significantly the actions of the hero, actions already well-known to his audience through tales, but he can censure them, as he does through Ulfin's speech. Uther's feigned concern over Gorlois' death masks his relief at the outcome, but does not hide his failure to observe the knightly code of fair play.

"In every literature a society contemplates its own image," writes Marc Bloch (102). Wace ensured that the Plantagenet courtiers saw themselves in the Trojan "knights" and dames, and recognized the Saxon lords and the Roman generals as fellow-players upon the stage of Geoffrey's history, the counterparts of the Normans' twelfth-century rivals. The refined conduct demanded of chivalrous knights and ladies, like the beauty, elegance and largesse admired by the court, is illustrated in Arthur's coronation scene. Both Geoffrey and Wace are at pains to point out that Arthur's court was the epitome of *courtoisie* in acts as well as appearance. "For at that time was Britain exalted unto so high a pitch of dignity as that it did surpass all other

kingdoms in plenty of riches, in luxury of adornment, and in the courteous wit of them that dwelt therein," writes Geoffrey (201). Even the peasant was more courteous and valiant than was a knight in other kingdoms, writes Wace, adding that ladies were courteous also (10499-502), thus praising all levels of Arthurian society and recognizing the importance of women's role at court. Knights and ladies bore the marks of courtliness in their clothing of a single color, but knights could win their ladies only after three times proving valor in the field. "Wherefore at that time did dames wax chaste and knights the nobler for their love," writes Geoffrey, echoed by Wace:

Li chevalier mielz en valeient
 E en estur mielz en faiseient,
 E les dames meillur esteient
 E plus chastement en viveient. (10517-20)

Wace develops the idea of the perfect knight imbued with *esprit courtois* and moved by love, the principal trait of chivalry, in an illuminating speech in which Walwein objects to Cador's claim that a long peace weakens a nation. Peace is good after war, Walwein says, the earth is better and more beautiful for it. It is good to joke and banter, and to play at the pleasure of love, for love and lovers make knights chivalrous (10765-72). This speech, which finds no counterpart in Geoffrey of Monmouth, marks the first

appearance in French literature of the notion that knightly deeds ("chevaleries") are performed, in part, to gain the appreciation of women (Shichtman 112). Walwein is in sharp contrast to Cador, who holds to the epic ideal which does not mix love and chivalry.

Wace bows in the direction of his women readers by bringing out the thoughts, feelings, and actions of his female characters where Geoffrey ignores them. Geoffrey makes no mention, for example, of Yguerne's reaction to her supposed husband's decision to make peace with the king; Wace says that she praised the counsel of him she deemed her lord, the king embraced her by reason of her tenderness, and kissed her as he bade farewell. In another example, the Norwegian queen's feelings for Gudlac are unreported in Geoffrey, who describes Gudlac as "desperately enamoured" of her (47); in Wace she takes an active role in informing her *ami* of her plight, using terms that will stir an immediate response (2439-50): she has long loved the King of Denmark, and sends him word that if he does not act at once he will never hold her in his arms. On the other hand, Wace ignores the passage in which Geoffrey touchingly describes the unhappiness of Innogen, Brutus' Greek wife, on leaving her kin and country, and Brutus' efforts to comfort her with gentle words and kisses; this excess of emotion, this *demesure*, as Innogen "falleth swooning again and again into the arms of Brute"

(17), is not to be celebrated. Wace tactfully omits Geoffrey's reason for the nephews' attack on Queen Cordelia: they "took it in high dudgeon that Britain should be subject to the rule of a woman" (42); in the *Brut* they hate her because she has inherited the land (kingdom) (2057).

Besides its social and psychological concerns, certain literary elements distinguish the courtly romance from its predecessors. Two of these elements are already evident in Wace: dramatization of the narrative through monologue and dialogue, and authorial intervention to establish the authority of the narrative, to impart a sense of immediacy and, occasionally, to manipulate audience response.

Where Geoffrey often adopts a distant reportorial voice, Wace, more the dramatist, speaks through the voices of the characters to create tension and add vigor. Brutus' threatening speech to Anacletus, a monologue in Geoffrey (11), becomes a dialogue in the *Brut* (375-84), with Brutus holding a knife to the throat of Anacletus as he speaks, and Anacletus begging to know how he can save himself. Geoffrey reports that Brutus "further instructed [his men] in what manner they were to do everything that was to be done" (13), whereas Wace repeats Brutus' direct speech to his barons on battle tactics. Wace remains silent over the ensuing carnage which puts Brutus in "a very tempest of delight" in the *Historia*. Throughout the *Brut* there is evidence of Wace's

awareness of the dramatic impact of a story: Geoffrey disposes of Morvid's battle with the sea monster in fewer than a dozen lines (60), whereas Wace creates an exciting spectacle of the king, "Fols est qui trop en sei se fie" (3440), devoured by the prey he has mortally wounded, and little mourned by *vileins* glad to be rid of both king and monster (3417-64).

Wace never hesitates to insert himself into the story as proof that what he is telling actually occurred. He lends his authority, for example, to the account of Julius Caesar's advent into Gaul and subjugation of Britain with the words, "ço testemonie e ço recorde / Ki cest romanz fist, maistre Wace" (3822-23). After faithfully reproducing Geoffrey's political lecture on unity--while Britain's lords were of one accord they were powerful and strong, but when discord arose it led to domination by a foreign power--he returns to his theme of the inevitability of change, adding that Fortune's wheel has turned and Rome has now regained its vigor (3883-84). When he has personal doubts about the veracity of the account, he is quick to suggest that listeners must judge for themselves:

Si dist l'on ço en verité,
 Ne sai coment ço fu prové,
 Que Morpidus plus en conquist
 E od sa main plus en ocist

Que ne fist tute l'assemblee

De la gent qu'il out aünee. (3401-06).

Sometimes he pleads ignorance: "Ne sai dire que puis devint" he says of King Cariz (13614), whose city was destroyed by sparrows. "Dunc prist li reis un messagier, / Ne sai serjant u chevalier..." (4695-96) he remarks of an unimportant detail that only serves to underline his concern for accuracy. "Deus, quel dolor! Dus, quel pechié!" he exclaims over the fate of the monks massacred at Bangor (13917), capping a particularly bloody, unchristian and unchivalrous account with his own expression of horror. His conversational asides illustrate an easy rapport with his audience--"Que vus fereie je lunc conte?" he asks (2905)--and increase their anticipation: "Mais ore oyez quel desturber!" (2478), he injects into the exciting account of the battle between Brenne and Gudlac, completing his intervention with a thrilling description of the great storm threatening the ships, "Ne poeit hom lever la teste, / Tant par esteit grant la tempeste" (2489-90). The poet's intrusions establish a particular relationship with his audience, encouraging them to share his amusement, doubts or judgments, and to become involved in the creative process.

Wace's desire to entertain and reflect society was only slightly greater than his urge to instruct and record. These dual ambitions found contemporary favor with an audience

eager to learn about the past, especially when information was fashioned with a poet's skill. His schoolmasterly "lectures" on geography, place names, genealogy and the Christian calendar were intended to correct, clarify, or elaborate the *Historia*. By relating events to familiar landmarks in history or in the Bible, by pointing out, for example, that Julius Caesar came to conquer the region to the west of Gaul sixty years before Jesus Christ was born of St. Mary (3827), Wace provides his readers with scaffolding to build a knowledge of British history. The Norman poet is not a slavish follower of his main source, adding a detail here--Constantin's mother, Eleine (St. Helen), finds the cross in Jerusalem (5720-24)--and another there, defining the size and disposition of a Roman legion (3182), explaining that sirens are sea monsters resembling women but descended from fish (734). Wace revises figures of Arthur's final battle to lend it more credibility, giving Mordred 60,000 men as opposed to the 800,000 in Geoffrey, and situating Arthur's landing at Romney rather than Richborough. All the cities of Italy taken by Brenne and Belin on their march towards Rome are named in the *Brut* (2866-74) though unnamed in the *Historia*, illustrating Wace's penchant for careful research.

In adapting Geoffrey's narrative, Wace does not hesitate to add names, such as Rommaret, or change them, substituting Rummarus (3365) for Kimar. But in the Brenne-Gudlac episode,

the woman over whom the battle is fought, the daughter of King Elfinges of Norway, is never named in either the *Brut* or in the *Historia*.¹ The biblical and literary convention that attaches great importance to naming opponents, where to name them gives power over them, is in operation here: Brenne never regains the wife who is kidnapped by her true love, effectively losing control over her.

Where Geoffrey neglects to provide sufficient causes for events or actions, Wace supplies them: for example, Cassibelan's appeal to his nephew Androgeus to intervene with Caesar on Cassibelan's behalf is based on cogent reasons of kinship, for one must not hate his relative to the death because of a little wrongdoing (4701-24); Geoffrey's Cassibelan appeals on the basis of the indignity to the British if he were to be taken prisoner (77), an appeal unlikely to move the nephew he is attempting to oust from the kingdom.

Wace is meticulous in imposing order on events, omitting passages from Geoffrey when they threaten continuity, and adding others, especially inventories of Arthur's proud knights, that he considers important to be recorded. He builds on Geoffrey's account of St. Augustine's work in converting English pagans, adding information on the saint's

¹Layamon, on the other hand, not only names Dalgan, Gudlac's lover, but also adds considerable detail, an indication that he may have drawn on sources other than Wace (Le Saux 84-85).

humiliation at the hands of Dorchester men who hung animal tails to the back of his robe. In answer to St. Augustine's prayers to have this dishonor marked forever, the men of Dorchester have ever since been born with tails. A second miracle produces a stream from the barren land at Cernel. Wace's sources for this material are St. Augustine's lives and William of Malmesbury (*Brut* n. 814). Arnold's suggestion that Wace possibly visited the district where the miracles allegedly took place raises the question of why the author did not mention his visit, as he was to do in the *Rou* over his trip to Broceliande to verify the evidence of hearsay. Had he done so, and not found Dorchester men with tails, his duty would have required him to record his findings. Wace undoubtedly knew better than to attempt to prove or disprove miracles. The written account of a saint's life presented sufficient authority without the necessity of further verification.

What has become the most famous of Wace's additions to Geoffrey--the Round Table--was based not on written evidence but on oral tradition; no version of the *Historia* makes mention of either the Round Table or of the marvels so fabled by the Bretons. That a writer with a reputation for honesty, biased against fabulous oral tales, should be the first to record references to them is further proof of the existence of an Arthurian tradition in mid-twelfth century (*Brut*

lxxxii). The Round Table is mentioned in a passage on the twelve years of peace won after many foreign campaigns, when King Arthur settles into the comparatively peaceful and luxurious life of the court, drawing his knights about him:

Pur les nobles baruns qu'il out,
 Dunt chescuns mielldre estre quidout,
 Chescuns se teneit al meillur,
 Ne nuls n'en saveit le peiur,
 Fist Arthur la Roünd Table

Dunt Bretun dient mainte fable. (9747-52)

Arthur had the Round Table fashioned to prevent squabbles over rank and precedence: every knight would be seated within the circle (*assis mesin*), and none outside it (*nul de forain*). According to Layamon, the choice of a Round Table was precipitated by a quarrel in hall to which the son of Rummaret² put an end (*Chronicles* 210), but whatever the immediate cause, the Round Table was almost certainly an ancient pan-Celtic institution (Fletcher 142). Wace's concept of a Round Table may have been influenced by the table reputed to be used at the Last Supper and seen by pilgrims in the Holy Land, or by a circular seating arrangement adopted at the Council of Rheims in 1049 (Foulon 100); more likely, however, Wace drew on the Celtic tradition of chiefs or kings seated at banquets with twelve warriors in

²Wace is the first to associate Rummaret (Romarec) with the Arthurian legend (Fletcher 142).

a circle around them (Loomis *Dev. Art. Rom.* 40).

Two further mentions of the Round Table make clear that it had a symbolic value apart from its use as a social equalizer. The knights of the Round Table who served as Arthur's personal bodyguard (10283-86) and later died at the Battle of Camble (13266-70) were praised throughout the world for valor and courtesy.

Oral tradition is the source, as well, of references to Rummaret, to Ewein (Yvain, King Urien's son, who will reappear as the subject of a romance by Chrétien de Troyes), and to the possible return of Arthur from Avalon. That Wace does not go farther in embracing an already established body of legend may be disappointing but can be readily explained: he respects too well the role of translator to incorporate vast amounts of material when he is skeptical of its veracity, preferring to place his trust in the truthfulness of the Latin version.

Because Geoffrey had entered the world of make-believe within the *Historia*, Wace had a duty, perhaps even an inclination, to do the same. The presence of the supernatural in a manuscript whose author claims to tell only the truth, is unsettling for modern readers who take the claim at face value. The element of magic was integral to Celtic folklore, highly appealing to audiences seeking--like all audiences--a touch of mystery and excitement not offered

by realistic detail. Wace, the skeptic, appreciated its appeal for his readers and refused to denude his story of the Celtic touch in the form of seers and wizards. He departs from the *Historia* to introduce the soothsayer, Teleusin, "a prophet believed by all," who prophesies the birth of Christ, a prophecy recorded and not forgotten by the British (4855-74). A further intervention of the magical is the appearance of King Edwin's wizard, Pelliz (Pellitus), whose great learning enables him to tell from the course of the stars and the flight of the birds what adventures will befall one. Wace's conception of Merlin is more like that of later romancers than is Geoffrey's (Fletcher 139), for Wace presents him as a great magician of unique power and position, but refuses to translate Merlin's prophecies. These prophecies had been written and disseminated by Geoffrey before he integrated them into the *Historia*; they were interpreted by historians of the period as predictions for the present and near future (Blacker-Knight 71). Wace protests that he does not know how to interpret the prophecies:

Ne vuil sun livre translater
 Quant jo nel sai interpreter;
 Nule rien dire ne vuldreie
 Que si ne fust cum jo dirreie. (7539-42)

He was probably justified in thinking that his audience would

not be captivated by the tortuous political symbolism the prophecies presented, and wisely decided to sacrifice them to the uninterrupted flow of the narrative.

Although magic is not an essential feature of medieval romance, the quest in some form usually provides its underlying theme. The basic plot of the *Brut* is a quest represented by Brutus' search for the site of a new Troy, and the adventures of the line of British kings, including Arthur, are, with few exceptions, public quests for power. The episode in which Bedoer (Bedevere), Arthur's *buteillier* and trusted knight, is sent to find the giant, Dinabuc, is an embryonic example of the solitary quest that is an essential feature of Chrétien's romances. Hearing great sighs and moans as he approaches the mountain and expecting to come upon the terrifying creature, Bedoer trembles with fright. To regain his courage, he tells himself that to fight the giant will be an *aventure*, to fear for one's life is cowardice (11355-68). In recognizing his duty privately rather than publicly and in undertaking a solitary quest rather than participating in a public expedition, he supplies the prototype of an Erec or Yvain. By supplying motives for Bedoer's actions and exposing the fear in the heart of an exemplary knight, Wace makes the knight an object of sympathy and admiration at the same time. Bedoer's emotions and thoughts are the creation of the poet; in revealing them, Wace takes a further step

beyond the epic or *chanson de geste* in the direction of romance. The Bedoer passage, so different from Geoffrey's, differs also from the treatment it would likely receive by later romance writers: the extended dialogue between Bedoer and the nurse, in which he asks who is in the grave, why the old woman is there, and why she continued to stay after Eleine's death, is more than an explanation of events, it is highly-charged poetic drama. But Bedoer has arrived too late to save the maiden, and it is Arthur who defeats her ravager in combat, robbing Bedoer and Wace of the conclusion essential to the classic medieval romance.

Uther's pursuit of Yguerne, the single example of consuming love passionately described by the poet from the kernel of Geoffrey's narrative, is a semi-private quest undertaken in the company of Ulfin and Merlin, whose enchantment draws the quest to a successful conclusion. The happy outcome cannot disguise that this quest ignores many of the rules of chivalry, for Uther's desire is not hidden but flaunted, and both Yguerne and her rightful lord are deceived.

Many critics have been led to believe, by the apparent similarities between the *Historia* and the *Brut*, that Wace advanced no farther than Geoffrey in promulgating the Arthurian, and by synecdoche, the courtly tradition. But Fletcher makes clear that the difference in their literary

styles, as well as Wace's addition of "an infinitude of minutiae," are significant in the study of the development of the tradition (128). The French metrical romance form is much more suited to courtly tales of adventure replete with descriptive passages than is the Latin chronicle. Wace is vividly descriptive where Geoffrey is formal and dignified, explicit where Geoffrey is vague. By describing in graphic detail what he as author could not know, Wace "is signaling that he is now working primarily in the realm of literature, from the point of view of the omniscient author" (Lacy 152). In many instances he employs monologue to replace Geoffrey's reported speech, or dialogue to replace monologue. He has his own stylistic hallmark, repetition, which he uses extensively to great effect throughout the *Brut*, so enlarging the possibilities of anaphora that he could be said to have founded a school of expression. His contemporaries and later writers would look upon his style as the prototype of the new stylistic form they were seeking to uncover.

Wace's translation and adaptation of Geoffrey's *Historia* made the Latin history accessible to a wider public, and in the process established his name as a poet. By contrast with earlier writers, he closely followed the narrative while enriching it with material from other Latin sources and incorporating, as well, limited additions such as the first recorded reference to the Round Table. The public welcomed

the *Brut* because of the facts it conveyed, the popular Arthurian material it contained, and its felicitous marriage of style and content. The *Brut* held a further attraction for the nobility who saw their lives mirrored in the customs and manners of Wace's knights and ladies, while Arthur's court represented life as they would wish it to be. In short, the values of courtly life shone through Wace's poem, the first of *la littérature courtoise*.

Today, it is the few lines on the fate of Arthur and the mention of the Round Table that have won Wace a place in the history of literature. It does little justice to his memory that he is not remembered principally as the harbinger of the courtly romance, or for his much-praised skill as poet, or because he added so much to our knowledge of the period in the *Brut* and in the next work he undertook, the *Roman de Rou.*

Chapter III

*Roman de Rou*¹

Wace must have been in buoyant spirits as he began his second long work, which he called the *Geste des Normanz*, in the year 1160. The *Brut* had already established him as the leading writer of his time,² displacing in popular taste Galmar and his history of the English (Frappier 65), and attracting royal patronage in the form of gifts and promises. As a sophisticated literary man, Wace realized he had identified a successful formula in combining the basic narrative of a respected Latin text with other sources, both written and oral, while using his imagination and rhyming skill to enhance the whole and please the readers.

A history of the dukes of Normandy, the rulers of his native land, was a natural progression from Wace's previous work on the history of the kings of England; taken together, the *Brut* and its successor form a powerful political tool, demonstrating Henry II's legitimate rule in a line stretching back to Brutus. Like the *Brut*, the *Rou* is based on historical figures, real not legendary, and their adventures, both real and legendary, beginning with a description of the exploits of the Viking Rou or Rollo, the first Duke of

¹In referring to the Holden edition, roman numerals to the left of the comma indicate parts of the poem, cardinal numbers indicate the volume.
²"It is indisputable that Wace was a livelier writer than his predecessors...." (Legge *Lit.* 30)

Normandy, who lends his name to the title by which the poem is generally known. Rou is given Normandy to deter him and other Norsemen from attacking the French, Normandy being part of the suzerainty of the French king. The time span covered by the *Rou* is significantly less than that of the *Brut*, two hundred years instead of fifteen hundred, beginning in the ninth century and ending with the Battle of Tinchebray in 1106. It is set principally in northern France and, briefly, Italy (for the adventures of the Viking Hasting), whereas the *Brut* encompasses most of western Europe. More than one hundred kings fill the pages of the *Brut*, whereas the *Rou*'s Norman dukes number fewer than ten, of whom William the Conqueror receives the bulk of the attention, followed by Rou's grandson Richard I (the Fearless), Richard II (the Good), and Henry I, grandfather of Wace's patron.

The writing of this "travail cremon" did not proceed in a straightforward fashion. Its four parts represent several attempts; to judge from the duplication of material it is unlikely that all four were intended to be incorporated into one poem.¹ Holden rearranges the sequence of the Duchesne manuscript, presenting the Chronique Ascendante (CA)² and

¹All four parts are found in only one manuscript (Duchesne 79 in the Bib. Nat.), a copy of medieval MSS, many of which have disappeared, making comparisons impossible.

²Pluquet called it Chronique Ascendante because it sketches the genealogy of the dukes in inverse order from Henry II to Rou. It seems to have been updated and revised after 1174 but before 1183.

Part II,¹ both written in alexandrines, followed by Part III which includes the bulk of the poem and is written in octosyllables. He concludes with what he calls the Appendix,² also written in octosyllables and containing about a hundred lines that are repeated in Part III.

Although Wace had no reason to attempt a different genre or make radical changes in his style as he began the *Rou* in 1160, his previous transformation of history into poetry having brought him a measure of fame, he was not content with stasis: the urge to change, develop, and innovate is apparent in the several parts of the *Rou*. In the *Brut* he had moved beyond the epic tradition in both form and content, using octosyllabic couplets in verses of varying length in contrast to dodecasyllabic monorhymed strophes, superimposing individual concerns on the national concerns of the narrative, reflecting all the while the mores, customs and preoccupations of the mid-twelfth century.

The heterogeneous nature of the *Rou* bespeaks several rewritings, an indication that the poet was groping towards a new means of expression, but raises no suspicions regarding

¹Wace's "disillusioned reflections" (*Rou* 3, 14) at the end of Part II led him to suspend his work because of scarce resources, not resuming with Part III until after 1170.

²Probably written as a first draft of Part III, it is concerned almost entirely with the Viking Hasting, mentioning *Rou* only at the end. Paris places it at the beginning of the whole work, considering it a better introduction to the *Rou* than the *Chronique Ascendante* (600).

authenticity of authorship.¹ Keller (*Etude* 25) sees the shift from octosyllabic couplets to alexandrine verses and back again as Wace's venture into a new, more popular style, supporting his argument by referring to two lyric lines in the centre of a description of war: "Ce fu a un matin, que l'aube iert esclarie, / que li oiselez chantent et la rose est florie" (II 3183-84). These lines, he argues, evoke the style of Chrétien de Troyes and of the *roman courtois*, but Wace, having been raised on the spirit of the *chanson de geste*, abandons the twelve-syllable alexandrine to return to composing in the meter that suited him best. Although Chrétien assuredly was influenced by elements in Wace, and the lyricism of these lines indicates that Wace was not unaffected by Provençal poetry, to suggest that the new literary style is embodied in the longer line flies in the face of the evidence.² The octosyllabic couplet, "equally effective in narrative and dialogue," is one of the literary techniques that make the new romance genre so seductive (Barron 8).⁴ Holden (*Rou* 3, 77) regrets the return to octosyllables, considering Part II to contain Wace's most vigorous writing. The successful but abortive foray into

¹Holden asserts that all sections are equally authentic and can be attributed without hesitation to Wace (*Rou* 3, 11).

²Of the romans believed to exist in 1160, both *Thèbes* and *Troie* are in octosyllables; the dodecasyllabic *Roman d'Alexandre* (namesake of the alexandrine) was not to appear for at least ten years. The *chansons de geste*, however, were written in ten- and twelve-syllable verse.

⁴Legge (*Lit.* 35) notes that the metrical form used by Wace and other writers of saints' lives and romances alike, is not dead yet.

alexandrines proves, however, that Wace was a versatile poet prepared to attempt alternate styles.

Wace's departure from the *chansons de geste* in both form and spirit, using shorter lines and lyric descriptions, further strengthens the argument that he is the forerunner of the courtly romance. Support for this view is found in Payen (*Litt. fr.* 88), who notes that the appearance of a new genre does not signify the disappearance of an earlier; both flourish concurrently. Eventually the *geste* genre is penetrated by the romantic, turning from warlike concerns to questions raised by the conflict of old and new values (207). Far from being old-fashioned, as Keller claims (26), Wace was one of a new class, equidistant from the *jongleur* and the dramaturge, passing beyond the recitation of timeworn tales but not yet ready to abandon historical underpinnings.

In the *Rou* Wace employs the same method of finding and exploiting source material that he had used in the *Brut*, relying this time on chronicles written by two monks, Dudo of Saint Quentin and William of Jumièges. In the early part of the eleventh century, Duke Richard II had commissioned Dudo to write *De Moribus et actis Normannorum*, a four-volume work encompassing the life of Hasting and the first three Dukes of Normandy. All subsequent writers, including Wace, were forced to draw on this material, politically biased and unreliable though it might have been, for it was the only

existing Norman account of events of this period. William of Jumièges continues the saga up to the death of William the Conqueror, abridging and adding details of his own. Later events are interpolated into his original text by Ordericus Vitalis and Robert de Torigny (although Robert's additions, made between 1142 and 1150, may not have been seen by Wace) before it finally becomes a research source for the *Rou*, and shortly afterwards, for Benoit in his *Chroniques des ducs de Normandie*. Again the situation is similar to Wace's relationship to Geoffrey of Monmouth: Wace lends credence to the chronicles by seeming to have absolute faith in them while embellishing the historical personages and backgrounds to suit the tastes of his public.

Despite the narrower scope of the *Rou*, the challenge it presented was even greater than in the *Brut*: instead of one principal source Wace had many, none of which was as widely read as Geoffrey's *Historia*. Absence of the popular Arthurian material required the substitution of a real-life hero whose exploits and *courtoisie* might approach the scale of Arthur's. To find such a one might seem an impossible task, but a hero was at hand, almost within living memory: William the Conqueror replaces Arthur as the poem's central focus, with more than 6000 of the nearly 17000 lines devoted to his life; his enemies are not Saxons or Romans, but the French whose "boisdies" and "tricheries" Wace sets out to

describe, and the English under Harold whom William must defeat to win his inheritance and establish the Anglo-Norman dynasty.

The advantages of a narrower focus are several: instead of the persistent flow "de rei en rei e d'eir en eir" that marks the narrative of the earlier poem, the *Rou*, with its limited number of protagonists, makes possible a deeper study of character and a more leisurely description of events. The fullness of Wace's account of the Battle of Hastings, for example, has long made it a source for historians, detailing as it does armour, harness, tactics, the movement and provisioning of troops, and lists of combatants.¹

Exploiting a vein he had opened with hesitation in the *Brut*, Wace confesses that he is drawing on oral tradition and popular tales, possibly even personal interviews with participants of the events he relates, as he enhances the Latin record of the Norman Conquest of Britain and the years which followed. Holden maintains that the original material Wace introduces, as well as the divergences between his version and the known sources,² are the result of his borrowing from other written sources since disappeared (*Rou* 3, 115). To ignore Wace's assertions that he has received

¹At the end of the last century, historians debated whether a wooden palisade or a wall of shields separated Harold's men from William's. Both sides cited Wace as their authority (Payen-Payne 12).

²Some details concerning the Conqueror's funeral derive from Ordericus Vitalis, others from William of Malmesbury. There is no continuing correspondence, however, between these texts and Wace's.

information from a particular source ("jo oi dire a mon pere" III 6423) and that certain information was not written down but told ("ne fu ceo pas mis en escrit / mais li pere le unt as filz dit" III 559-60) would surely be foolish, confirming as these statements do that word-of-mouth is one of his sources. Holden wisely cautions, however, that where such remarks are absent, the source is not necessarily oral (114). Wace, he maintains, mistrusts popular traditions--especially the *jongleurs'* expanded versions of *chansons de geste*--as reliable sources, considering them unworthy to be used in a work of history like the *Rou*: the historian's professional scruples and the elevated notion he has conceived of the dignity of his task prevent his excessive use of hearsay. Although the topos of the unreliability of the oral tradition appears throughout the *Brut*, Wace's reservations did not prevent his making several additions from that source; the *Rou* invites similar additions because the events and personages described were relatively recent, and Wace could often testify to the truthfulness of the teller. Though not relying excessively on what he heard, he did incorporate oral history and legends into his vernacular written record, while complaining that many good stories are not written down through carelessness, laziness or ignorance (III 341-46).

Wace knew that the *Rou* would be a long and difficult travail: "Longue est la geste des Normanz / e a metre grieve

on romanz" (III 5297-98). He may have been urged to undertake this major project by a commission from his royal patron; the prebend at Bayeux was possibly an advance on work to come, rather than recognition of the *Brut's* achievement.¹ Given his other duties as *clerc lisant*, purveyor of short duty poems, and canon at Bayeux, Wace could not direct all his time to the task of gathering material on the history of the Norman dukes. At this juncture in his career--as he approached his sixtieth year--he may well have taken stock, not only of his talents as a poet, but of the expectations he had to fill. Wace had established himself as the best if not the first poet to recount in the French language what passed for history, taking pains to emphasize the accuracy of his accounts. That his histories flowed melodiously from his pen was the measure of his rhyming skill and his popularity. Although he was still wedded to historical subjects, his concern for truth did not prevent him from enhancing situations through an immense talent for visualization, without thought of inventing stories. To invent a tale out of whole cloth, as opposed to enhancing that which already existed, was unthinkable: until this time, "the aim was not 'creation', in our sense, but re-creation--the elaboration and transmission of inherited material" (Vinaver 54).

¹Textual evidence bears out this theory: Wace began writing the *Rou* in 1160 (CA 1-4), citing gifts and promises from Henry and Eleanor, but the prebend is not mentioned until Part III 174, written after 1170.

When Wace undertook the *Rou* in 1160, other writers were digesting the *Brut*, "the most skilful rendering of [the *Historia*] available at the time" (Le Saux 117) and the precursor of the *roman breton* based on Celtic tales. Incipient romanticism--the taste for the fabricated tale in a quasi-historical setting--was already taking root in *romans antiques* such as the *Roman de Thèbes* (after 1150), the *Roman d'Eneas* (1155-60), and the *Roman de Troie* (about 1160); once the romance mode had found an expressive pattern appropriate to the Middle Ages, "there was almost no story-matter which could not be reinterpreted to fit it" (Barron 179). And the romances of Chrétien de Troyes would appear within the decade, incorporating the Matter of Britain in a manner both highly imaginative and distinctive.

Courtly literature, with its vision of a distant past or an idyllic world that offered a temporary escape from the realities of life in a cold castle, was well-suited to be read in an intimate atmosphere. Unlike the majority of nobles, the ladies of Eleanor's court could read the vernacular and a few, like Marie de France, were sufficiently educated to read Latin. More often than not, *romans* were read aloud, sometimes to oneself, at other times to collections of friends, especially if these friends were women. As courtly literature developed, it compensated women for their absence from the epic by picturing them in an

idealized and powerful role as the dominant force in a love relationship, with knights kneeling to honor them and striving to serve them. Love as a fatal power is a theme central to the *lais* of Marie de France. Her predecessor Wace, however, could not claim to set an example in either subject or format. First, while he recognized that love could exert a powerful influence, he did not see it as the prime mover of men. Secondly, the larger canvas of generations of noble men and women pleased him more than the miniature of the human heart. Although the *Brut* takes tentative steps in the direction of exalting love, through Walwein's speech on the importance of *chevaleries* and the mention of knights jousting for the honor of their *amies*, the *Rou* shows only a knight's admiration and respect for ladies. Courtly deeds are executed on behalf of women, but there is no single instance of a woman's love as the motivation for a courtly deed. The affection of Richard I for his Danish *amie*, Gunnor, wins Wace's approval: "Li quens l'ama, s'en fut sa amie / mut fu bele lur druerie" (III 245-46). If their mutual pleasure in love ("druerie" being the same word Wace uses in Walwein's speech in the *Brut*) is beautiful, it does not suggest either obsessive passion or the predominance of the *amie*. Gunnor is praised for her beauty, her upbringing and courtesy, for being debonair, amiable, generous, honorable, and for knowing as much as a woman could know of

woman's work. Richard later marries the mother of his five children, and loves her always. Like Chrétien's Eric and Enide, Richard and Gunnor are both lovers and man and wife. Wace captures in a fresh and simple way the tenderness and joy of their relationship, and seems to relish their happiness but he cannot be said to idealize it.

Wace's *Rou* is not a *roman* in which woman becomes the veritable heroine, nor is it an epic in which woman is ignored or disdained. Her presence and her influence are felt but not exploited. Among Richard's marvellous adventures is one in which a knight, discovered in a compromising situation, beheads the lady and is beheaded in turn by the Duke who cries "Femme deit aveir partut pair" (III 546). There is deference to and recognition of women as individuals, apparent in the appeal of Robert Corte Hose to the Queen for safe passage (III 10553-59), and in his earlier decision not to disturb her confinement (10339); and evident also in the role Regnier's wife plays in ransoming him from Rou who rewards her marital loyalty with generosity, returning half the treasure (II 360-392). But respect is not love-service. Robert's relationship with his mistress Arlot, mother of William, is the straightforward one of a king who loves a pretty girl but marries elsewhere. The tale of Gunnor and Richard's wedding night is that of a wife asserting the rights of her married status. Aristocratic

ladies might read the *Rou* for its fascinating retelling of relatively recent history, might laugh at its amusing anecdotes and be enlightened and entertained, but those whose thoughts turned only on love and wished to see their sex exalted would be disappointed.

Given that he chose to adhere to what was deemed truth, and that creation of textual material was frowned upon, Wace, for much of the final 2000 lines of the *Rou*, is forced to resort to his imagination more than he would have liked, conflating original material with material from many diverse (and now unknown) sources in a masterful manner. Holden has painstakingly separated those sections of the *Rou* which may be attributed to other sources from those found only in Wace; an analysis of the latter leaves no doubt that Wace possessed great facility for bringing history to life, going well beyond the accepted parameters of creativity.

In a passage that is largely original, for example, Wace paints with superb skill a picture of the fleet moored at Saint Valéry, waiting for winds to set them on their way to England: the barons grow bored with waiting and pray to the relics of the Saint. The Duke places a lantern and a golden weathervane at the top of the mast to guide his fleet; the prow of the ship bears a copper sculpture of a child with bow and arrow, facing England and seeming always to aim at it, no matter which way the boat sails. Wace disputes the size of

the fleet, given in some accounts as 3000 boats, saying that his father had often told him there were 700 less four, or 696 ships, boats and skiffs (III 6423-6432). Only two ships sink, perhaps because they are overladen. The wealth of detail lures the reader on to the quay to watch the fleet bob at anchor, and provides historians with their only eye-witness account of one of the more momentous events in British history.

Preparations for the Battle of Hastings, beginning with William's embassy to the Pope, include factual references that can be corroborated, such as the mention of the large star that appeared for fourteen days, also mentioned by Gaimar, and subsequently identified as the periodic comet named after Edmund Halley. In the twelfth century this heavenly sign augured the reign of a new king; Wace spoke to many men who saw it (6325). When Wace's sources are incorrect, his facts cannot always be accurate (*Rou* 3, 151) despite his vow to relate nothing that could not be substantiated ("ne sai noient de ceu, n'en puiz noient trover, quant je n'en ai garant n'en voil noient conter" II 1365-67). He swears to the truth of the "miracle" that follows the treacherous agreement between Henry and the Caennais (III 11308): the garden in which it takes place never again bears fruit.

His quest for certainty, however, is no idle boast: to

underline his sincerity, he describes the forest of Brecheliand (Broceliand), much fabled in Breton folklore, and the fountain of Berenton where one could see, it was said, fairies at play. He went there expecting marvels, saw the forest and the land, but found nothing miraculous, and returned calling himself a fool: "fol m'en revinc, fol i alai; / fol i alai, fol m'en revinc, / folie quis, por fol me tinc" (III 6396-98).¹

The Battle of Hastings, magnificent and momentous as the Siege of Troy, is the stuff of epic: Norman rights are at stake, combat is on the grand scale, women share no place in it. Yet Wace's poem bears evidence of the shibboleths separating *roman courtois* from epic: William's courteous treatment of the messenger (III 6887-96), giving him horse and clothing, and of the two captured English spies, contrasts with Harold's ill-natured behavior, bordering on madness, when he receives William's emissary, Huom Margot. William pursues every opportunity to avert war, seeking parleys, offering a part of the kingdom, finally suggesting that the matter be settled by hand-to-hand combat between the two leaders; but Harold will have none of it. Harold's earlier show of courage turns out to be false, and his conduct unbecoming a chivalrous knight: his last-minute

¹This passage is often cited as a possible source of Chrétien's description of the fountain in Yvain: Eins i alai, ensi revinc, / Au revenir por fol me ting, / Si vos ai conté come fos / Ce qu'onques mes conter ne vos.

attempt to avoid the battle by fleeing to London is prevented by his brother (in a scene mirroring the William Longsword-Count Boton episode). William, on the other hand, shows all the hardihood and courtesy of a knight of the Round Table, and even more wit. In contrast to the battle in the *Brut* between King Arthur and Frolo, the two opponents at Hastings appear unequal in their valor, prowess and discipline.

But very little in life is all good or all bad. Wace acknowledges this ambivalence in turning away from the Norman chroniclers to adopt Ordericus Vitalis's English point-of-view, often less favorable to William and his descendants (*Rou* 3, 113). His reasons for doing so remain a mystery, unless one accepts his quest for objectivity, for he himself was a fervent Norman patriot (*Rou* 3, 38). Norman accounts omit, and Wace includes, certain elements of the Conqueror's history that could have irked King Henry: William tricks Harold into swearing upon a saint's bones to represent William's interests to King Edward the Confessor (5685); Edward, on his deathbed, agrees to transfer the kingdom to Harold (5823); and, especially, the words Wace puts into William's mouth expressing doubts about the legality and the morality of taking England:

Engleterre conqui a tort
a tort i out maint home mort,

les eirs en ai a tort ocis
 e a tort ai le regne pris... (9141-45).

Further evidence that Wace may have been too truthful for Henry's taste lies in the picture he paints of Henry I. The young leader who initially inspires hope becomes an avaricious, cruel ruler who succeeds through his ability to buy troops rather than through their loyalty: "Li reis se fia es deniers...a tant doné et pramis que le duc Robert ont laissié et por le rei l'ont guerreié" (10851-64). Wace reiterates the point:

Le plus de la chevalerie
 e le mielz de la baronie
 out li reis par ses dons od sei,
 le duc laissoent por le rei. (11159-62)

When Bayeux, where Wace later holds a prebend, stands between Henry I and his control of Caen and the Bessin, Henry, together with Count Helie, sets Bayeux alight, burning chapels, monasteries, and the Bishop's palace from which the rich adornments are carried off by Helie and his men. Henry's war is not only with Duke Robert, Wace tells his courtly audience, but with the Church as well, and in his *démessure* Henry will stop at nothing to gain his ends. He uses his position to act with unwarranted force, taking revenge on William, Count of Warenne, because William had teased him about his love of hunting; Henry, when he becomes

king, seizes all his lands (III 10505-62).

For his part, Duke Robert emerges as a hopeless military strategist, a spendthrift, and a gullible object of threats and ruses: in return for a loan, he releases his stalwart retainer, Richard de Reviere, to become Henry's man (9397-422); he quails when confronted by Robert de Meulan, abandoning an attack on Henry at the threat of imprisonment, and giving up claim to the debt Henry owes him (10581-652). When Robert Fitz Haimon abandons him for Henry, the people of Bayeux shout that Fitz Haimon should be hanged, their anger generated not by love of Duke Robert but by contempt for a man who deserts his rightful lord (11101-02). In Wace's objective portrait, the Duke shows the compassion and respect for a lady expected of a twelfth-century knight: on his return from the Holy Land to find that Henry has been crowned King of England, a position Robert feels he should hold as eldest son, Robert sets out with his knights for Winchester; on hearing that his sister-in-law lay there in childbirth, "vilains sereit qui dame en gesine assaldreit," he turns instead toward London to find the King (10336-42). His compassion is not restricted to women, for in an earlier battle for the Cotentin, when Henry is besieged at Mont Saint Michel and dying of thirst, Robert sends him a barrel of the best wine ("ne sai se il en out pitié," Wace remarks) and declares a day's truce so that those on the Mont can

replenish their stocks of water (9579-94), a true gesture of *courtoisie*.

Although Holden (*Rou* 3, 166) suggests that the scene in which Henry I shows initial reluctance to accept William's crown, a hesitation not recorded elsewhere, might illustrate Wace's discretion towards his patron, Wace clearly is no sycophant. He does not attempt to fill the chasm between the real and the chivalric ideal with flattering words, and it is unlikely that he would make an exception in this one instance; more probably, the source of this account has disappeared. In the skirmishes between royal brothers, Wace seems to favor the juster cause, revealing a trait that is, in itself, characteristic of courtliness and chivalry.

On the few occasions when Wace permits a look at the interior lives of his characters, he conveys their self-doubts graphically and concisely without the interior monologue of later romances to depict these moments of personal crisis. The description of William's reaction upon hearing the news that Harold has inherited the throne of England reveals a man at war within himself: William speaks to no one, ties and unties his mantle, and sitting on a bench, shifts his place from time to time, covers his face with his mantle and rests his head against a pillar, remaining deep in thought (III 5861-72). His belief that Harold has wronged him is later contradicted by his deathbed

speech (III 9141) wherein he regrets that, having conquered England "a tort," it is not his to bequeath to his son. A further example of the poet's ability to capture in a few lines the essence of an emotion is his description of the King of France, a picture of grief as he surveys the rout of his troops at the Battle of Varaville: he groans and sighs in sorrow and indignation, and can say nothing; all his limbs tremble and his face burns with rage (III 5273-76).

The *Rou* continues, in a historical sense, where the *Brut* leaves off. Artistically, the *Rou* successfully essays a new verse form which the author abandons because it does not suit him or his audience. Arthur and the legendary characters of the *Brut* have disappeared, supplanted by a line of dukes lacking the air of mystery of Arthur's court and, after William, the charisma of his leadership. Their interests are exclusively military; ladies and love play little role in their lives. Far from idealizing these ancestors of his own sovereign, Wace sees them as men possessed of great courage not always linked to great humanity or good sense. In rounding their personalities from the flat, one-sided figures of his Latin sources, Wace creates believable human beings with the aspirations and flaws of the nobles who ring the court.

Wace's honest and even-handed treatment of the dukes possibly upset Henry II, leading him to commission Benoit de

Sainte-Maure to take up the genealogical poem.¹ In 1174, fourteen years after he had begun writing it, Wace abandoned the *Rou*. Although there is no evidence that the popularity of his poems suffered, he put down his pen and, so far as is known, wrote no more.

Where or when he died has never been established. Perhaps he returned to Jersey, the island of his birth, or to Caen where he grew up and spent many years as a *clerc lisant*, or, though it is less likely, lived out his final days in England. Sometime between 1174² and 1183³ he died and was buried in an unmarked grave: it would have been an honor richly deserved to be buried where he held his prebend, in the crypt of Bayeux Cathedral, had Henry's disaffection permitted it, for the *Rou* is "le monument le plus curieux qui nous reste de l'histoire et de la langue des Normands sous la domination de leurs ducs" (Pluquet xi).

The *Rou* is something of an anomaly: in subject matter it is farther from Arthurian romance than is the *Brut*, whereas poetically it is as well-crafted, with more lyrical passages, and in tone often more reflective. But it shows little nostalgia for the past, nor does it dwell on the

¹While Dronke (283) believes Henry was a "perceptive enough critic to know how much better a poet Benoit was than Wace," Legge (Lit 364) says that Henry's preference for Benoit "can only be deplored by posterity."

²CA62 refers to the siege of Rouen, 1174, one of the conflicts between Henry II and his sons.

³The reference to "nostre novel roi, qui roi ne peut regner" (CA67) is to Henry II's son, who was twice crowned but never reigned, and died in 1183. Wace's poem treats him as living.

complexities of love, two of the preoccupations of writers in the last quarter of the twelfth century. By allowing his imagination to color the record of events not long past, Wace helped fashion a taste for history beyond the annalistic. His efforts at transforming the Norman Dukes into courtly heroes was a step towards the treatment of character in the later romances, although his heroes were sometimes morally blemished and all too human in their lapses. He rationalized and exalted the feudal system, stressing the importance of loyalty to one's liege lord in almost the last words he wrote (III 11383-88), a theme that would underlie the chivalric romances wherein the knight paid homage to the lady.

Chapter IV

Conclusion: Wace's Role in the Romance Tradition

"French romance is part of the life of the time, and the life of the twelfth century is reproduced in French romance," writes Ker (322). The poets of Wace's time grew up with epics in their head and ear but wanted to express in their own works the life of the time, to humanize epic heroes, bring courtliness to battle scenes, unite love and prowess, elevate female characters and introduce something of the concerns of Ovid and the Provençal poets. "The French epics," Ker states, "are full of omens of the coming victory of romance" (57); in Wace, some of the portents are realized.

Even Wace's earliest surviving poems, the saints' lives, a mixture of religion, history and the miraculous, employ the romance verse form and reflect to some degree the customs of the time. His aptitude for composing vivid descriptive passages, beloved of the romance, and his affection for subjects such as maritime storms become evident. Saints' lives and epics continued to be recited throughout the twelfth century to large gatherings in church and hall, though more sophisticated tastes preferred the romance read in private. Romances demanded intellectual detachment rather than the emotional involvement which oral performance of both saints' lives and epics invited.

In the *Brut*, Wace successfully satisfied the changing

tastes of his audience and the wishes of his future patron, Henry II, by freely translating a Latin chronicle which posited the legendary Brutus as first king of Britain, and devoted one-third of its length to a description of King Arthur as the foremost courtly hero. The *Brut* portrayed Arthur's protection and expansion of his realm as an attempt to bring justice and courtliness to the peoples of other lands; it emphasized his qualities of *mesure*, generosity, and compassion, the elegance of his court, the prowess of his knights and their respect for and devotion to their ladies. Though love is not the central focus, its effects are described and feats of arms performed for the attention of ladies. Women begin to be seen as individuals with power to affect events.

To judge by the example of the *Brut*,¹ the romance in 1155 could be defined as a poem in octosyllabic couplets about valorous knights preoccupied mainly but not exclusively with overwhelming an enemy, their conduct mitigated by *mesure* on and off the field of battle. Unlike the epic, which concentrates on deeds of national consequence, the romance adopts a concern for the protagonist's thoughts and feelings, and provides motivations more complex than the defeat of villains (often represented as pagans), the greed for land

¹The Roman de Thèbes (1150) does not exist in its original version; it was reworked at the end of the twelfth century, making it an unreliable indicator of the state of the roman c.1150 (Frappier Table 254).

and riches, or the desire to pillage and slaughter in retribution for a wrong. These coarser instincts are sometimes channeled into tournaments, watched and applauded by one's *amie*, into battles won by stratagem as much as by brawn, into the conquest of land in order to give the inhabitants a good and courtly lord. The experiences in themselves are little changed from the *chansons de geste*, but the quality of the experience has shifted radically. A valorous knight shows compassion; he is thoughtful and shrewd; above all, he exhibits that quintessential quality of the twelfth-century hero, *mesure*.

Wace, the first to "translate" completely Geoffrey of Monmouth into the language of the Anglo-Norman court, deviates from his written source to incorporate oral material on Arthur, his court and the Round Table, the subject of many tales told by *jongleurs*. The method of translation used in the *Brut*--amplifying, abridging, conflating written and oral material--influenced other writers who went on to develop the Matter of Britain. They concentrated on revealing the meaning of the story, adding to it whatever thoughts they considered appropriate in an effort to raise the work to a level of distinction which no straightforward narration could reach (Vinaver 17).

Within fifteen years the romance would develop to focus on the individual quest in response to a challenge, elevating

woman's role as *seigneur* in a love relationship patterned on the feudal, while engaging in debate over moral dilemmas. It would become, as Hunt defines it, a critical and playful investigation of "cases" involving the relationship of love and chivalry, using the marvellous both to generate and to characterize *aventure* (21).

Wace's pioneering venture into Arthurian material could have made him the foremost writer in the romance genre if he had nurtured the seeds he had sown, and if his inclination had permitted him to dwell on matters of the heart. Instead, a commission from Henry II led him from the Matter of Britain into a romanticized history of the Norman dukes. For fourteen years, off and on, Wace struggled with the work that should have built on the considerable reputation established by the *Brut*, and while he struggled the popular imagination was captured by certain themes: the glorified role of ladies and the love-service required of their lovers. These were not themes that Wace chose to develop in the *Rou*. Rather, he attempted to instill wonder and excitement where possible in long well-crafted passages which emphasized the realities of the human condition--stalwart men acting out of self-interest and spite or with courage and conviction, their political astuteness vying with feudal loyalty--juxtaposed with the ideal but often unrealistic expectations of the court. The tension between actuality and aspiration provided a powerful

stimulus to imagination.

The *Rou* is a valuable record of events within living memory, especially the Battle of Hastings which, for all its courtly overtones, is still presented as a battle of epic proportions and significance. Wace offers much more than a straightforward narration of chronological events; he enlivens source material with his imagination and gives meaning through his understanding of the people, events and places he describes, never forgetting that they are real people and real places. In moving away from the heroic tradition into new forms of expression, *romanciers* often lost touch with reality, glimpses of the real world giving way to "the heavy-laden, enchanted mists of rhetoric and obligatory sentiment" as Ker describes a passage in the *Chevalier au Lion* (353); but Wace never loses touch with his real world, even if magic, giants and dragons occasionally creep in. The real world has always had its mysteries.

He frequently states that he tells only truth and was not unique in claiming written sources as a guarantee; where these sources were lacking he offers his own name as proof of authenticity. When he draws from folklore rather than learned origins, he admits as much, always clearly differentiating between the "fables" of *jongleurs* and the truthfulness of his own accounts.¹ His claims can sometimes

¹Similar claims, possibly patterned on his, are made by Marie de France who claims authenticity for her *lais* drawn on folklore.

be corroborated by contemporary sources, although even when his facts are inaccurate he had no intention to deceive. He believed in what he wrote and had no wish to remain anonymous; moreover, as a professional literary man he laid claim to material that was his own. Reciters of epics never claimed authorship; romancers almost invariably announced themselves.

From an examination of Wace's oeuvre, in particular the *Brut*, it is clear that he had already adopted the romance's verse form and initiated a personal style of presentation by taking command of his material, interjecting personal comments, irony and wit. Certain themes that find their way into the romance--the solitary quest, enchantment, and the idea of love as an elevating sentiment--are present in embryo, to be developed by Marie de France, Bérout, Thomas of England, and the grand master of the *roman courtois*, Chrétien de Troyes.

Wace's role in the literary development of the twelfth century was a crucial one: he defines, within his lifetime, the change in literary taste from saints' lives to fabulous feats of knighthood. As a chronicler he created poetry from the skeleton of history, and as a poet he engendered a fruitful combination of style and subject matter that would ripen into the body of works known as the romance.

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